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The Experiences and Responses of Business Graduates to Employer Selection Mechanisms: A Case Study of a Private Business-Oriented Higher Education Provider

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**The Experiences and Responses of Business Graduates to Employer
Selection Mechanisms: A Case Study of a Private Business-Oriented
Higher Education Provider**

Roxanne Tracey Stockwell

A thesis submitted for the Doctorate of Business Administration

University of Bath

Higher Education Management

August 2019

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Candidate's signature Roxanne Stockwell

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements	8
Abstract.....	9
Chapter 1 - Introduction	10
Introduction.....	10
Literature on the problem	11
The study	12
The structure of this dissertation.....	13
Chapter 2 – Employment and Employability: A Key Policy Focus	14
Policy developments.....	14
Key contestations around the role of higher education in employment and employability ..	17
Defining employability	17
Pedagogy of employability literature	19
Work experience literature	20
Conclusion	21
Chapter 3 – Graduate Selection, Skills Identification, Signalling and Related Theories.	23
Skills identification and graduate selection.....	23
Graduate perspective studies.....	24
Employer and recruiter perspective studies.....	25
A large scale quantitative study	27
Selection in action studies	28
Signalling, human capital and positional conflict theories	30
Related theories.....	32
Contribution	33
Chapter 4 – Research Design and Methodology	35
Introduction.....	35
Overall approach.....	35
Research philosophy.....	36
Case studies.....	38
Types of data collected	39
Phone survey data.....	39
Research interview data	39
Data collection	40
Data analysis.....	41
Phone surveys – primarily quantitative	41
Research interviews – primarily qualitative	41
Integrated analysis and interpretation	41
Ethical considerations	42
Consent.....	42
Fair reporting of Participant views	43
The interviewers.....	43
Evaluation and limitations.....	43
Validity	44
Reliability.....	45
Generalisability.....	47
Conclusion	48
Chapter 5 - The Case	49

Introduction.....	49
Defining the case	49
The site.....	49
Mission and strategy	50
Regulation and approvals.....	51
Structure and finances	52
Students	52
The researcher	53
The Participants	55
Course details	55
Academic results.....	55
Extra-curricula activities	55
The findings chapters	57
Chapter 6 - The Overall Findings of the Case	58
Introduction.....	58
The data	58
Current activity.....	58
The mean perspective	59
The percentage of Participants perspective	61
The successful application perspective	63
Successful applications	63
The graduate scheme v general jobs perspective	63
Conclusion	64
Chapter 7 - Specified Selection Activities	65
Introduction.....	65
Online tests.....	65
Description	66
Viewpoint of Participants.....	66
What employers are looking for	67
Analysis	68
Presentations and written exercises.....	69
Description	70
Viewpoint of Participants.....	71
What employers are looking for	71
Analysis	72
Teamwork.....	73
Description	73
Viewpoint of Participants.....	74
What employers are looking for	75
Analysis	76
Conclusion	77
Chapter 8 - Other Selection Activities.....	78
Introduction.....	78
Asymmetric video exercise	78
Description	78
Viewpoint of the Participants	80
What employers are looking for	80
Analysis	81
Data analysis tasks and role-plays.....	81
Description	81

Viewpoint of the Participants	84
What employers are looking for	84
Analysis	85
Internships and work experience	85
Description	86
Viewpoint of the Participants	86
What employers are looking for	88
Analysis	88
Conclusion	88
Chapter 9 - Interview.....	90
Introduction.....	90
Description	91
Types of interviews.....	91
Pragmatic.....	91
Introductory.....	92
Competency based	92
Fitting in.....	95
Discussion topics.....	98
The irrelevance of the degree content	98
The degree as a tick box	100
Second syllabus	101
Conclusion	102
Chapter 10 - Indirect Signals.....	103
Introduction.....	103
Playing to the gallery	104
Lying.....	104
Adjusting personality.....	105
“Performing” teamwork	105
Choosing dress	106
Signalling compliance	108
Researching the employer.....	108
Showing interest.....	108
Demonstrating values	109
Signalling uniqueness	110
Pinetree as a USP signal.....	110
Constructing USP signals	111
Taking a risk.....	112
Conclusion	113
Chapter 11 - Digital Signalling.....	114
Introduction.....	114
LinkedIn.....	114
The portfolio of professional signals.....	114
Mutual signalling	115
LinkedIn as a signalling tool.....	115
Key words	116
Adopting corporate dialects.....	116
Creating a feedback loop	117
Digital honey pot	117
Digital screening.....	119
Reverse screening	120

Conclusion	121
Chapter 12 - Networking.....	122
Introduction.....	122
The prevalence of networking.....	122
How networking is used.....	123
Job opportunities.....	123
Advice and guidance.....	125
Unsuccessful networking	126
Attitude to fairness issues.....	127
The complexity of fairness.....	127
Proving yourself	128
Family networking.....	129
Justifying networking.....	131
Advice to other students.....	133
Conclusion	135
Chapter 13 - The Emotional Landscape.....	136
Introduction.....	136
The pain of rejection	137
Opting out.....	140
Special characteristics.....	141
Merely a number	144
The box fitting game.....	146
Advice to others.....	148
Advice for students.....	148
Ideas for companies.....	148
Conclusion	150
Chapter 14 - Analysis and Conclusion.....	151
Introduction.....	151
Summary of overall findings.....	151
First sub-question.....	151
Second sub-question.....	152
Overall findings	153
Theoretical discussion	154
A signalling spectrum	155
A double equilibrium.....	157
Revisiting signalling assumptions.....	159
The signalling function of the degree.....	166
Theoretical explanations for the preference for graduates	168
Policy and professional practice implications.....	170
Communicating to students.....	172
Design of the learning experience.....	174
Allocating responsibility.....	175
Conclusion: A Zero Sum Game	176
Appendices.....	178
Appendix 1 - Endnotes and Participant quotes protocol.....	179
Appendix 2 - Tables	180
Appendix 3 - Participants quotes	196
Appendix 4 - Phone survey instrument	266
Appendix 5 - Question and prompt sheet for research interviews	272

Appendix 7 – Samples of coding in NVivo	281
Appendix 8 – Nodes.....	336
References.....	346
Endnotes.....	369

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Abstract

This thesis is a single site case study of the early-in-career job-hunting experience of 47 recent business graduates from a private London-based business-focused higher education provider during the period 2014-2018. This is a primarily qualitative mixed methods project, and provides an in-depth exploration of the phenomenon of the transition to work by using interviews and surveys to explore the job application and selection process as actually experienced by the Participants. It collects information on successful and unsuccessful applications, and on graduate scheme roles and general jobs. It specifically explores what skills, knowledge and attributes employers asked the graduates to demonstrate during the recruitment and selection process, and what other activities the Participants underwent in order to secure post-graduation work. It uses the conceptual framework of signalling theory as a lens to understand the transition to work phenomenon, with some references to the closely related concepts of positional conflict theory and human capital theory. It is intended to make a contribution to the literature on graduate job selection and signalling theory, and to explore some of the implications for higher education policy and professional practice in universities.

Chapter 1 - Introduction

Introduction

Universities in the UK are undergoing a period of great change that has raised points of contention around the sector's purpose and function (Brown, Lauder and Ashton, 2011; Collini, 2012; Marginson, 2016b; Naidoo, 2016; Williams, 2016; McCaffery, 2018). One of the major issues under scrutiny is the link between higher education (HE) and employment. Many important issues such as the way universities are held accountable, the future financial sustainability of a mass system, the contribution of universities to the economy, career-oriented marketing to prospective students, student rationales for studying higher education, the policy justification of tuition fees as an investment, and the importance of social mobility in an increasingly polarised society have a fundamental link to the employment outcomes of graduates.

The importance of employment to students, policy makers and universities leads to the issue that is the catalyst for this study. This is a particularly important issue in the current policy context of English higher education, particularly since the Browne review of 2010, the resulting introduction of a new tuition fee regime in 2012 (Hubble and Bolton, 2018), the passing of the Higher Education and Research Act in 2017 (Hansard, 2017) which established a new regulator, the Office for Students (OfS), with an increased focus on employment outcomes (OfS, 2018a, 2019c), and the extension of employment related data collection from the DLHE survey¹ to the recently introduced Graduate Outcomes (HESA, 2018c, 2019a).

Students are encouraged to see university as an investment in their careers, with the return being well-paid, highly skilled work and greater employment security than non-graduates (Browne, 2010; Willetts, 2015; OfS, 2019a, 2019e). This rationale is used to justify the increased tuition fees, and therefore underpins the majority of funding for the entire university sector. Tax-payers are assured the higher taxes paid by graduates and the improved productivity and skills levels developed by the university experience means a better economy for all (Dearing, 1997; Browne, 2010; Willetts, 2015; OfS, 2019g, 2019b).

While by no means the only – or even the primary – purpose of university study, graduate employment outcomes are of critical importance to students, universities, business, government and the wider society. My underlying motivation in this empirical study² is to better understand the experiences graduates undergo in job selection in order to develop insights for how institutions could construct the learning experience of undergraduates so as to promote both the wider benefits of higher education and more specifically post-graduation employment. This is a hugely important issue because universities are expected to enhance the career prospects of their graduates, and are judged on their employment data: employment rates,

¹ Destination of Leavers from Higher Education – a survey of graduates collecting information on their employment.

² I also refer to this as the dissertation, thesis, case study or study. The terms are used interchangeably.

salaries, and whether graduates are in high, medium or low skilled jobs (HESA, 2018a).

The problem is, however, that the processes related to the transition to work as experienced by graduates is not well understood. It is not clear what skills and attributes are sought by employers in practice, nor how they are defined and assessed in the hiring process.³

These issues are fundamentally important to understand. The experience graduates undergo in order to secure employment, what employers appear to be seeking in the reality of their selection practices, and how they assess competing applicants enables us to better prepare students for the post-graduation transition to work.

Literature on the problem

We know a great deal about the skills and attributes that employers say they need, and those that are considered to be in short supply, as there have been numerous studies asking employers and recruiters about their requirements (De La Harpe, Radloff and Wyber, 2000; Barrie, 2006; Coll and Zegwaard, 2006; Hernández - March, Martín del Peso and Leguey, 2009).

However we have much less information on how the job selection process actually works in practice, and a limited understanding of the extent to which employers actually look for skills⁴ during that process and how they determine whether or not graduates have the relevant skills (Keenan, 1995; Carless, 2007; Branine, 2008). We are not even sure how the various skills are defined by employers, nor how to measure them objectively (De La Harpe, Radloff and Wyber, 2000; Cremin, 2009). In particular we have very little on this from the perspective of graduates describing their lived experience of applying for work.

Researchers have therefore called for more work on the transition to work experience of new graduates, and in particular the need to develop a greater understanding of the selection techniques used by employers (Celani and Singh, 2011; Bangerter *et al.*, 2012; Velasco, 2012). They have also asked for more research on defining what is meant by different skills in the context of job selection, as the simple lists presented in most studies are too abstract (Brown, Hesketh and Williams, 2004; Nilsson, 2017). It is this gap in the research that my thesis seeks to address.

It is also clear that graduate job-hunting has become increasingly competitive (Brown, Hesketh and Williams, 2004; Brown, Lauder and Ashton, 2011; ONS, 2017) so that graduates have to invest in additional proxy indicators of employer-attractiveness beyond the degree, and employers have to invest in job selection processes to handle vast numbers of applications (Keenan, 1995; AGR, 2016; Lam and Hawkes, 2017; High Fliers Research, 2019a). This study therefore also looks at what additional activities graduates embark on in order to obtain employment.

³ See the literature discussed in Chapters 2-3.

⁴ This dissertation is not about skills per se. Therefore the word “skills” is not used as a term of art in this dissertation, and often interchangeable with “attributes” and other requirements of employers.

Many have criticised the lack of theoretical foundations in the study of employability and skills (Brown, Hesketh and Williams, 2004; Yorke and Knight, 2007). This study deploys signalling theory as employers must decide from large numbers of qualified applicants. We know that the hiring of new graduates is a market of imperfect information, and that signalling theory helps us understand how employers use signals (especially educational qualifications) to make hiring decisions (Spence, 1973).

However, how signalling theory works in what has become a highly congested graduate market, what sort of signals are used, how multiple signals work together, and how they are measured is unclear. One of the foundational writers on signalling theory, Spence, was writing in 1973 when there were far fewer graduates. He focused on using signalling theory to distinguish between graduates and non-graduates using the single signal of a degree. It is now necessary to distinguish between numerous qualified graduates and use much more than the degree as a signal of relative productivity.

In terms of signalling theory, researchers have said there is a need for a greater understanding on how it links to other theories (Celani and Singh, 2011; Hussey, 2012; Bergh *et al.*, 2014; Rospigliosi *et al.*, 2014). More work is requested on understanding pooling and separating equilibriums and the use of portfolios of signals, including in the context of graduate recruitment and selection (Spence, 2002; Connelly *et al.*, 2011; Bergh *et al.*, 2014).

This therefore justifies the need to research the university-to-work transition as experienced by recent graduates, and the implications such research may have on our understanding of signalling theory, as well as for professional practice and policy.

The study

The central research question is as follows:

How did this group of early-in-career business graduates⁵ from a small, private, business-focused institution experience the post-graduation job-hunting transition in terms of the specific activities they underwent in order to secure work during the period 2014-2018?

This is supported by two sub-questions:

- What were the specific job selection activities and assessments set by employers as experienced by the Participants?
- What other actions did the Participants undertake in their attempt to secure work and what other themes emerged that help us understand the phenomenon of early-in-career job-hunting?

This is a single site case study of a private London-based higher education provider during the period 2014-2018. The provider is unique in being a wholly owned subsidiary of a global FTSE 100 education company, yet set up as a non-profit and

⁵ The Participants

with its own independent governing body. It is a boutique institution of only 1200 students, incorporated in 2012 and therefore very young in Higher Education terms, and comprises two schools in Business⁶ and the Creative Industries. Its mission is to transform the way business and academia work together in Higher Education for the benefit of students.

This is a mixed methods project, though primarily qualitative, that provides an in-depth exploration of the phenomenon of the transition to work of recent business graduates. It uses interviews and surveys to explore the job application process as actually experienced by the Participants. It collects information on successful and unsuccessful applications, and on graduate schemes roles and general jobs. It specifically explores what skills, knowledge and attributes employers asked the graduates to demonstrate during the recruitment and selection process.

It uses the conceptual framework of signalling theory (Spence, 1973) as a lens to understand the phenomenon, with some references to the closely related concepts of Bourdieusian positional conflict theory and human capital theory (Brown, Cheung and Lauder, 2015). It is intended to make a contribution to the literatures on graduate job selection and signalling theory, and to explore some of the implications for higher education policy and professional practice in universities.

The structure of this dissertation

This chapter has provided an introduction to the thesis as a whole. In Chapter 2 I outline the contextual background of policy changes in UK higher education which have placed the issue of graduate employment centre stage. Drawing on the literature which problematises the relationship between higher education and employment, I interrogate some key assumptions made by policy makers. Chapter 3 undertakes a review of related studies on graduate selection as well as skills identification and the relevance of work experience to job selection. This chapter also introduces the conceptual framework of signalling theory. This is followed by Chapter 4 which provides a detailed description of the methodology, and then a depiction of the case itself in Chapter 5. The overall quantitative findings in the format of descriptive statistics are provided in Chapter 6. Chapters 7-13 present the findings on the various activities experienced by the Participants, in the form of in-depth qualitative data and further descriptive statistics. There is some interpretation and analysis given in each chapter. Chapter 14 concludes the dissertation with an analysis and discussion of the findings. It firstly summarises the overall findings, and then provides a detailed theoretical discussion as well as an exploration of implications for policy and professional practice.

⁶ Pinetree Business School (PBS), and the focus for this case study.

Chapter 2 – Employment and Employability: A Key Policy Focus

In this chapter I begin by outlining the significant policy and regulatory changes that have placed the post-graduation employment of students centre-stage. I then draw on the employability literature to problematise some of the key assumptions of policy makers. This chapter forms the contextual basis for the empirical study.

Policy developments

For the past decade the UK higher education sector has been going through significant and on-going regulatory and policy change, stimulated in part by the post-war long term growth in student numbers and the impact of the recession in 2008. The changes for this past decade can be seen as starting with the publication of the highly influential Browne Review (2010), and culminating with the passing of the Higher Education and Research Act 2017 which established a new regulator; the Office for Students (OfS) (Hansard, 2017). This has created a new regulatory era, with all universities and providers having to register with the OfS under new institutional categories, and with new obligations in relation to students and data reporting. As the OfS only came into existence this year (2019) this transition is ongoing (OfS, 2019d).

The Browne review (2010) proposed significant changes to undergraduate funding in which students would pay more and universities would compete in a more overtly marketised sector (Molesworth, Scullion and Nixon, 2010; Naidoo and Williams, 2015; Tomlinson, 2018). Despite considerable opposition, a threefold tuition fee increase was introduced in September 2012 in the belief that investment decisions for undergraduate education should now largely be made by students (BIS, 2011b, 2011a; Williams, 2014).

This change could be regarded as a seminal moment in UK higher education history and part of a philosophic shift towards a more consumer-oriented sector (strengthened by guidelines from the CMA⁷ (2015)) in which students pay for a service and are encouraged to view that payment as an investment, with the expected return being well-paid employment (BIS, 2016a). This matches the views of students that indicate the main motive for attending university today is to enhance career prospects (NUS, 2008; UUK, 2016).

In 2015 an equally significant development was the removal of student number controls, making it possible for the first time to implement the Robbins Report recommendation that university should be open to all who are qualified and can benefit (Robbins, 1963). Up until then, numbers had been tightly restricted, but now institutions can recruit freely (HM Treasury, 2013; Hillman and HEPI, 2014). As UK universities are free to decide on their own admissions criteria, including open access,

⁷ Competition and Markets Authority that protects interests of consumers and classifies university students as consumers.

this means they can now be open to a much wider range of students. This is a remarkable commitment by government as it means that literally everyone can go to university, provided an institution will accept them. The official discourse surrounding the Browne Review also included a strong focus on social mobility (Browne, 2010; Sutton Trust, 2010; BIS *et al.*, 2015), and this is arguably enabled by removing student number caps (Hillman and HEPI, 2014; Mansfield, 2019).

These two policy developments are of particular relevance to this study. The combination means universities have seen a considerable increase in tuition per student⁸ and they can now recruit unlimited numbers. This means that a financial incentive has been created that encourages universities to maximise enrolments that has not really existed before (Anderson, 2006). It also puts universities in much more direct competition with each other, and while some will expand others must inevitably contract, and therefore will need to reach out to a wider range of students (potentially improving social mobility) to maintain current levels of revenue and financial sustainability.

This thesis argues that these systemic changes push the undergraduate system to become both more open (including the admission of students with lower prior academic achievement) and more expensive as a whole (primarily through the fee increases but also potentially through number increases (Department for Education, 2018b)). This inevitably leads to questions on how universities should be held accountable and how they should be financed (Department for Education, 2018d). Government policy is evolving answers to both these questions, and in a way that is directly relevant to this research.

Firstly, a new Teaching Excellence Framework (TEF) was introduced in 2017, intended to measure the quality of teaching (Willetts, 2014). Employment rates are included as a quality measure with an aim to link this directly to graduate salaries in the future (Dept for Education, 2016; Anon, 2017). The success of graduates in the job market is therefore now part of the definition of good teaching and students are encouraged to use this data in making decisions about university study (HEFCE, 2016; OfS, 2019h).

Secondly, and even more importantly, undergraduate funding is now almost entirely supported by income contingent student loans (Student Loans Company, 2018). The consequence is that the long-term overall financial sustainability of the sector is now directly dependent on graduates' earnings. Therefore it is submitted that if universities are to retain their freedom to decide admissions and to grow numbers, and keep their £9k (plus inflation) tuition fee levels, it is essential that graduates find well-paid jobs. If this does not happen then university study will not be considered a

⁸ This is following many years of decline in financial resource per unit (Smith, Phillips and Simpson, 2018). As inflation starts to impact the sector is once again in danger of the resource per student declining, but whether universities should be permitted to increase tuition by inflation is controversial (Hubble and Bolton, 2018).

good investment for students or the tax-payer, and the current funding model is likely to be questioned.⁹

It is therefore (rightly or wrongly) in the interests of universities that the undergraduate experience is managed in a way that leads to well-paid employment. This is also in the interests of students, as can be seen in student opinions (NUS, 2008; UUK, 2016; Neves and Hillman, 2017). It may or may not be in the interests of those committed to social mobility. In England there is a strong link between social class, school achievement, university attended, graduate employment and career earnings (OECD, 2013; Jerrim, 2014), and therefore an emphasis on well-paid employment could incentivise universities to exclude “riskier” students. On the other hand, for such students it is perhaps even more important that universities strengthen their understanding of how graduates secure work in practice. This knowledge could be used to create a learning experience that (amongst other things) really helps such students to secure that all important first post-graduation job (Richards, 1984b; Steffy, Shaw and Noe, 1989; Saks and Ashforth, 1999). This would be a genuine contribution to social mobility. The alternative could be greater debt for the poorest.

This concern on the impact on employment of university study for under-represented groups is reflected in recent regulatory changes brought in by the OfS. Previously the focus was on access ie getting more people from such groups to attend university (Hillman *et al.*, 2017). However, the OfS has made it clear that it will now also measure employment progression for under-represented groups and that this will become part of the responsibility of universities (OfS, 2018b).

These developments are undoubtedly controversial (Collini, 2012; Willetts, 2015; Marginson, 2016a). Tuition fees continue to be highly contentious, as does the financial sustainability of institutions, debt for students and debt for the country (Fazackerley, 2017a, 2017b; Inman, 2017; Sparrow, 2017). The ability to admit a “wider range” of students (which in the UK often means poorer students who did not do as well at school) (OECD, 2013, 2016) can be seen as a democratisation of the university experience, but it sits alongside the fear that many will end up saddled with debt, not in graduate jobs, and feeling deceived by the university system. These issues therefore cut to the very heart of the purpose of university study: Who should be admitted? Who should pay? How big a subsidy should the tax-payer provide? Should university be about preparing students for work or be for “pure learning”?

Such questions also need to be positioned within the wider UK and international context. The economic recession of 2008 (from which the country has only partially recovered (Eaton, 2019)), the financial insecurity linked both to Brexit and global economic instability, and rising concerns that poorer parts of the population have suffered unfairly (Vaitilingam, 2009; Dugan, 2013; Inman, 2017), mean that arguing for greater subsidy for the privileged students attending university may be hard to justify. The global shift in the graduate talent pool (Hays and Oxford Economics, 2016)

⁹ Indeed the funding regime is frequently questioned, most recently in the Augar review (yet to report) (Department for Education, 2018e).

and the impact of technology and globalisation on the job market (Brown, Lauder and Ashton, 2011) mean that students can no longer assume a degree automatically leads to a well-paid and secure jobs (Holmes and Mayhew, 2015; Department for Education, 2017c; Salvatori, 2018). The on-going concerns about skills shortages, the weak alignment of UK degrees with industry needs, the supposed under-employment of graduates, and the alleged dissatisfaction of employers with graduate skills (OECD, 2013; Holmes and Mayhew, 2015; McGowan and Andrews, 2015; CBI, 2017) indicate that the university curriculum and pedagogy may need reviewing. In short, the pressure on universities to help solve these problems has increased, and this dissertation contends that one of the key issues is the employment prospects of graduates.

Key contestations around the role of higher education in employment and employability

In this section I turn to the employability literature to interrogate some of the assumptions of policy makers and higher education regulators.

Defining employability

One of the major issues for higher education institutions is that employability itself and its associated skills are not well-defined or conceptualised (Brown, Hesketh and Williams, 2003; Barrie, 2006; Bennett and Kane, 2009; Cremin, 2009). Various definitions are however presented. For example, Fugate describes employability as the ability to adapt to change (2004), Holmes as the evolution of a graduate identity (2015) and Williams as a multi-faceted construct with elements of human capital (acquisition of education and skills), career management (combining signalling and identity models) and context (including Bourdieusian positional conflict theory) (Williams *et al.*, 2015). Others stress lifelong learning and career management (Stewart and Knowles, 1999, 2000b, 2000a; Stewart, 2001; Forrier and Sels, 2003; Bridgstock, 2009). Several commentators have endeavoured to create a framework for employability, that takes into account its multi-faceted elements (P. T. Knight and Yorke, 2003; Pool and Sewell, 2007; Clarke, 2017). However, none have been accepted as the dominant definition of employability. Cremin (2009) claims that employability and its associated skills (“fluff”) are abstractions, and can never be clearly defined and never completely fulfilled. He argues that employability is “...an open concept that can include within its register the infinite variations of what the employer wants...” (Cremin, 2009, p. 145) and that graduates can never be employable enough.

Interestingly, employability is not generally defined as employment. Rothwell is critical of this and argues that there is too much focus on employability in the literature and not enough on employment (2008; 2009). In his view it is the future of real jobs that matters and how universities prepare their students for this. His rather pessimistic perspective of the future of the labour market looks at the negative impact of technology and globalisation on jobs. In many ways Brown takes a similar view and for similar reasons in *The Global Auction* (2011), as does Berg in *Education and Jobs: the great training robbery* (2003), and Woolf in *Does Education Matter?*

(2002). For a recent example see Lambert (2017). Tymon suggests that while employability is different to employment, it is only the latter that matters, and that for students employability is employment (2013). I endorse this view¹⁰ and emphasise that this study is about employment, or rather the attempt to secure employment, and not about any theoretical construct of employability.

When it comes to external measures of university performance, UK universities are undoubtedly measured on the employment rates of their graduates (HESA, 2017). This will become even more so in the future when the measurement will be not just on whether graduates are employed, but increasingly on how much they are paid and this will be linked directly (and controversially) to the official measurement of teaching excellence (BIS, 2016a; Gibbs, 2016; HESA, 2018d, 2019b).

However, in the literature a common argument is that universities cannot be held responsible for the economy and the employment rates in society, and therefore employability is too complex to define simply as employment (Yorke and Knight, 2006). Additionally some argue that recruiters are not always economically rational (Harvey, 2000; Brown, Hesketh and Williams, 2003; Brown, Hesketh and Williams, 2004; Celani and Singh, 2011; Tymon, 2013)¹¹ and structural issues such as class apply in the selection of graduates (Brown, Hesketh and Williams, 2004; Moreau and Leathwood, 2006; Lauder *et al.*, 2012; Brown, Cheung and Lauder, 2015; Holmes and Mayhew, 2016; Burke *et al.*, 2017), both of which are outside the control of the university.¹²

The essence of this argument is that developing employability (insofar as it is seen as a duty of universities) cannot mean employment because there are too many factors outside the control of the university. While both persuasive and logical, this could be seen as a somewhat university centric definition and one unlikely to be shared by government, students or society. Harvey makes a similar argument in reverse in his discussion of ways to measure employability (2000). He is critical of simply using employment outcomes, because this is then claimed as an institutional achievement rather than that of the graduate. This is an interesting perspective as it raises the idea that claims (implicit or explicit) by universities to “cause” employment could be seen as a colonisation of the graduate’s success, rather like the colonisation by selective universities of students’ school results as part of their own institutional prestige and “quality”. Harvey questions the whole assumption of causation between university activities on employability and employment rates and points out the complicating role of the employers as “...it is the employers who convert the employability of graduates into employment” (Harvey, 2000, p. 102). The issue of causation (or lack of) is discussed in Chapter 14.

¹⁰ See section on “the researcher” in Chapter 5.

¹¹ Given the imperfect information issue discussed in Chapter 14 in relation to signalling, query whether it is even possible for employers to act truly rationally.

¹² The claim that structural issues are beyond the control of universities is debateable given UK institutions are free to decide on admission. One could make a case that universities are complicit in maintaining the structural issues, by insisting on using academic qualifications that are closely linked to class and wealth. This is part of Bourdieu’s argument.

In short, there is no agreed definition of employability, nor an agreed theoretical approach, nor agreement that universities should or even can be responsible for employment (Tholen and Brown, 2018). However, McQuaid says that the dominant definition in the literature is the individual's employability skills and attributes (2005). This is primarily a human capital perspective, in which students acquire or earn employability skills (largely through education) by which they increase their productivity, and employers choose the most productive graduates for their business (Becker, 1994; Berg, 2003; Brown, Hesketh and Williams, 2004; Keeley, 2007).¹³ It is underpinned by several assumptions: individual responsibility and agency in the acquisition of skills, economically rational decision making by employers, employers' ability to identify skills correctly during recruitment and selection, that skills lead to greater productivity, that graduates compete on a level playing field and therefore "talent will out", and that universities are able to develop those skills as learning outcomes. Certainly this is the perspective emphasised in government policy (Dearing, 1997; Browne, 2010; BIS, 2016b; OfS, 2019d).¹⁴ This study explores some of these assumptions by looking at how skills and attributes are assessed by employers in order to make hiring decisions.

Pedagogy of employability literature

There are a numerous case studies that provide details on specific initiatives within universities designed to develop employment relevant skills and knowledge. For example, Gault and Sheppard look at the use of practice weeks in Business degrees (2010) (2015), Mortimer at employer projects incorporated within an HR¹⁵ course (2012), Harris at the potential use of KTPs¹⁶ at undergraduate level (2013), Butcher at the use of creative industries projects with schools and pupils as the clients (2009), Cheng at real world projects in engineering (2013), Yung at a simulated work environment for engineering (1997), Albrecht at the impact of guest lectures in a tourism degree (2012), and Freudenberg at the design of a co-curricula professional development course embedded in Australian business degrees (2011).

Yorke strongly rejects this individual case study approach and argues that employability must be developed system wide to be effective ie at programme or university level (2003). He presents his USEM¹⁷ model of employability, perhaps one of the most academically respected conceptualisations in this area, although Pool suggests it is too theoretical and complex and presents his own alternative Career Edge model (2007). Other theories and frameworks are developed in the literature including Bolden's analysis of 27 case studies (2009); Cole's framework developed for the HEA¹⁸ (2013); Cooper's guide to WIL¹⁹ (2010); Pegg's work on pedagogy for

¹³ The literature discussed below on the pedagogy of employability and work experience raises the question of whether work related skills can effectively be developed through education, or whether this is better achieved when in employment.

¹⁴ For an alternative view see "related theories" in Chapter 3 below and positional conflict theory.

¹⁵ Human resources.

¹⁶ Knowledge transfer partnerships.

¹⁷ Understanding, Skills, Efficacy, Meta-cognition

¹⁸ The Higher Education Academy, now Advance HE.

¹⁹ Work integrated learning.

employability (2012); Wedgwood's analysis of current practice and suggested framework (2008) following on from the Leitch review (2006); and most recently Clarke's six dimensional framework that includes both human capital and social capital elements (2017).

Despite all this work by universities and researchers, there remains a serious question as to whether employability development at university does, should, or even can, improve labour market outcomes.

Tymon (2013) states that while certain skills can be developed, many of the attributes sought by employers are personality related, especially the need for a "proactive personality" (see also: Brown *et al.*, 2006; Sutton Trust, 2010; Manroop and Richardson, 2016). He argues that it is doubtful that such characteristics can be developed. This is explored in Chapter 13. Tymon's work resonates with Brown's study (2004) and his "aesthetics of employment" and the key role played by personality in job selection; and with the extensive use of interviews and personality tests in selection techniques (Pollard *et al.*, 2015). This resonates strongly with the findings in this study and is discussed in Chapters 7 and 9.

Mason's study supports the argument that employability cannot be taught effectively in universities by academics (Mason, Williams and Cranmer, 2009). Instead he presents evidence that work experience or direct employer engagement is necessary for a positive association with labour market outcomes. Cranmer makes a similar point when she reports on the discouraging results of a HEFCE study on the impact of teaching and learning initiatives for employability (2006), and Yorke also states that some aspects of employability can only be taught in the work place (2006). Mason concludes that teaching employability skills in the classroom, building it into learning outcomes, and other indirect methods are a waste of time and resource. Tymon agrees that the university classroom is not the right place for such learning, and supports this with the results of his focus groups with N=400 business undergraduates who see such an embedded classroom approach as pointless, but work placements as crucial (2013). Jackson also finds skills teaching has only a very small impact on employment in comparison to networking, proactive job-hunting and the prestige of the institution attended (2013), and Harvey argues there is no evidence for university teaching of employability having a causal link with employment (2001). Perhaps all this explains why employability has been recently described as a "toxic brand" and why students are sometimes disengaged with overt but artificial attempts to develop employability (Grey, 2018).

Work experience literature

The argument that direct employer engagement is essential is strongly supported by much of the literature on the impact of work experience (here defined broadly as including sandwich years, internships, placements and similar). Although there are questions about the fair allocation of such opportunities which have a tendency to be colonised by privileged students (UK Cabinet Office, 2009; Tholen *et al.*, 2013; Rivera, 2015; Montacute, 2018; Pemberton and Humphris, 2018), there is considerable evidence showing a positive association with employment (Patrick, Peach and

Pocknee, 2008; Gault, Leach and Duey, 2010; Helyer and Lee, 2014; Sanahuja Vélez and Ribes Giner, 2015; Silva *et al.*, 2016) and skills development (Arulampalam, Smith and Naylor, 2007; Jackson, 2013; Andrews and Higson, 2014). Students themselves believe placements are important but that embedded employability teaching is not (Tymon, 2013). Interestingly, there is an additional positive association with improved academic results, even allowing for variables such as background and prior achievement (Knouse, Tanner and Harris, 1999; Billett, 2009; Binder *et al.*, 2015), though the correlation is not straightforward and the relationship between work experience and outcomes is a complex one (Purcell, Wilton and Elias, 2003; Wilton, 2011; Baert *et al.*, 2016; Okay-Somerville and Scholarios, 2017; Jackson and Collings, 2018). Even Becker, the father of human capital theory, argues that employers would learn far more about the productivity of employees through six years of work experience rather than six years of education (1994). Work experience has itself become one of the 'attributes' sought by employers according to the skills identification literature outlined above.

Conclusion

The brief overview of the literature interrogating policy makers' assumptions, as well as problematising the university's role in employment and employability, provides an important context for the empirical aspects of this study. I have shown how government discourse is largely about skills shortages, economic impact, and employment rates of graduates (Dearing, 1997; Browne, 2010; BIS, 2011a, 2016a; OECD, 2015; HEFCE, 2016). I have also indicated that universities themselves often emphasise learning for its own sake and disinterested research (Anderson, 2006; Collini, 2012; Stockwell and Naidoo, 2017) but nonetheless promote enhanced employment prospects in their marketing to prospective students. Student surveys show that one of the main reasons for attending university is to enhance their career prospects (NUS, 2008; UUK, 2016). Students, government and universities emphasise the importance of social mobility (NUS, 2016; Department for Education, 2017a; Universities UK, 2018). However, others argue that whatever the intention of universities and government, and whatever the discourse of commitment to social mobility, the de facto function of universities is to reinforce economic and class privilege under the guise of a faux meritocracy, and that in fact the best jobs go to the most privileged students (Bourdieu, 1977; Lauder *et al.*, 2012; Jerrim, 2014; Brown, Cheung and Lauder, 2015; Burke, 2015; Clarke, 2017).

The employability literature questions many of the policy assumptions. It suggests that employability is difficult to define, and that universities' attempts to enhance employability are not necessarily effective. The work experience literature suggests employability may be better addressed outside the university than within it. The literature casts doubt on the impact of human capital theory that underpins much of current Higher Education policy, and at least to some extent supports the alternative notion of reinforcement of social privilege through the education system. Finally, the reality of the wider economic context inevitably impacts employment outcomes, irrespective of any action by universities or students.

A key factor running through all this is the link between the undergraduate university experience and post-graduation employment. A clearer understanding of the job-hunting phenomenon for recent graduates is therefore of relevance to universities as it could impact their design of the student experience, and influence their narrative on their purpose and function. It is also of importance to policy makers and tax-payers. Given the strong emphasis of government on employment as the “return on investment” for degrees, a fuller understanding of how employment comes about is useful for the design and implementation of appropriate regulation. Finally it is important for students. If career prospects is the top reason for studying a degree, then understanding the reality of how employment is secured, and the role of not just the degree but other activities and experiences is crucial for students. Therefore both the literature and the higher education context show that there is a need to more fully understand the reality of post-graduation job-hunting as actually experienced by graduates. The next chapter reviews the extant literature on similar studies, including graduate job selection studies and the graduate skills identification literature.

Chapter 3 – Graduate Selection, Skills Identification, Signalling and Related Theories

This chapter begins by presenting the existing literature on skills identification and graduate selection. I then describe the conceptual framework related to signalling theory which will be used in this study.

Skills identification and graduate selection

Given the focus on employment, an important body of literature for this project is the “skills identification literature” ie studies that identify the skills and attributes employers say they seek from graduates.²⁰

There are numerous studies that have interviewed and surveyed employers and recruiters to identify skills needed (Hodges and Burchell, 2003; Pittaway and Thedham, 2003; Barrie, 2006; Coll and Zegwaard, 2006; Kavanagh and Drennan, 2008; Hernández - March, Martín del Peso and Leguey, 2009; Wickramasinghe and Perera, 2010; Robles, 2012; Andrews and Higson, 2014; *Higher Education and Research Bill*, 2016) and equally numerous “wish-lists” have been generated (Lowden *et al.*, 2011; Finch *et al.*, 2013; Wilton, 2014; CBI, 2017). Some of these wish-lists are extensive, featuring an ever-growing number of skills and attributes. These go beyond knowledge and skills linked to subject areas studied in degrees, and now encompass many aspects of personality and character (Brown, Hesketh and Williams, 2004; Cremin, 2009; Tymon, 2013). This is caused in part by the increasing numbers of graduates and therefore the increasing competition for graduate jobs and congestion in the labour market (Pollard *et al.*, 2015).

My own synthesis of the skills identification literature above indicates the following as the most important skills and attributes: collaboration skills (ie the ability to work in teams), communication skills (oral and written including presentation skills), willingness/ability to learn, commercial awareness (aka business acumen or customer focus), and work experience²¹. I based this synthesis on 65 studies that identified skills and attributes sought by employers, primarily from the employers’ perspective, but also from that of students and graduates, and merged synonyms together to come up with this short list of the most frequently required skills and attributes.

I now turn to a review of the studies on graduate selection. These are found in the graduate recruitment and selection literature. Note that recruitment generally refers to the attraction of applicants and selection to the decision making process by which graduates are offered employment (Carless, 2007; Branine, 2008). This study is focused on graduate selection techniques.

²⁰ Note that industry specific “hard skills” such as engineering for engineers are not covered in this study as the focus is on generic skills and business graduates.

²¹ Work experience is not a skill as such, but is frequently required and therefore I have classified it as an “attribute” for these purposes.

Although there is an extensive body of literature exploring the skills needed by employers, the process of selection of recent graduates is under-researched, and in particular there is very little on what skills and attributes employers look for in actual practice and how employers determine whether applicants have the skills sought (Keenan, 1995; Brown, Hesketh and Williams, 2004; Carless, 2007; Branine, 2008; Wilton, 2011; Bangerter *et al.*, 2012; Velasco, 2012). This in itself is an important gap in the existing literature, and one where this study aims to contribute. It is of limited value to graduates to be provided with a list of skills that employers need, without some insight into how they will be required to demonstrate them. As described above there are many studies that use interviews or surveys to ask employers about what they require, but this may or may not align with the actual experience of new graduates attempting to secure work (Wilson, 2016). The central element of this study is to explore what employers actually do in the selection process. There are few studies that look at actual “selection in action”. The small number of studies that do are summarised below in order for me to carry key insights into my own study as well as highlight gaps in knowledge to which my study responds.

Graduate perspective studies

Wilton (2008) asked 1060 graduates, four years after completion, to compare skills developed at university with those actually needed in work. This is similar to this project in that graduates are asked about their actual experience, although he does not specifically explore the initial job-seeking phase. However he does provide an analysis of the link between self-perceived development of employability skills at university, and labour market outcomes for this sample. He finds there is no link. Instead his analysis concludes that statistically employers prefer white males from established/elite universities, even if there is no development of employability skills at university. He concludes that skills development does not help with social mobility as it is not what employers seem to be looking for in practice. Does this mean that universities fail to develop skills despite trying to do so? This explanation would be supported by Mason’s study (Mason, Williams and Cranmer, 2009). An alternative explanation is that the definition of each skill varies from person to person, and across graduates, universities and employers meaning we do not have a common understanding of the nature of these employability skills (L. Holmes, 2001; Tymon, 2013). Is the very concept of “employability skills” just an abstraction as Cremin argues (2009), used to create a faux meritocracy of job allocation? Or is the assumption that employers select graduates on the basis of skills they need simply incorrect, and actually (perhaps subconsciously) they are looking for something else altogether? (Brown, Hesketh and Williams, 2004; Carey, 2008a; Rivera, 2015). Wilton (2014) calls for an urgent need to understand more fully the selection techniques and rationale used by employers. This study is a partial response to that call.

Similarly, Andrews (2014) attempts to find out about what skills were needed in the transition to work from the perspective of both employers (N=20) and business graduates (N=30) through a series of qualitative interviews across four EU countries. Key skills were identified (technical knowledge where relevant, teamwork, presentation skills and work experience) but this study did not explore the recruitment and selection process itself.

Velasco (2012) surveys 200 employed recent business graduates and asks about the importance of 13 specified skills in obtaining their first graduate position. The most important in order were enthusiasm, personality, teamwork, integrity and technical literacy. While these were the attributes perceived by the respondents as the most important in securing their first graduate role, they were not asked about the selection techniques and he notes this as a gap in the literature.

A number of other studies look at student and graduate views of skills developed at university (P. Knight and Yorke, 2003; Crebert *et al.*, 2004; Mize, 2007; Tomlinson, 2007, 2008) but this is not triangulated in any way with job selection processes.

Employer and recruiter perspective studies

Branine (2008), on the other hand, does identify selection techniques used for hiring graduates by surveying UK employers across a range of industries and sizes who had advertised graduate roles within the previous six months (N=326 on a 50% response rate). Not only did he ask about techniques used, he also described how this had changed over time (based on a literature review) and asked about the reasons why certain techniques were chosen. In a related and more recent study he identifies selection techniques used across four EU countries through questionnaires of a range of employers (N=252) (Branine and Avramenko, 2015). The focus on identifying selection techniques and the reasons for choosing same, makes these highly relevant studies. However he does not explore how skills and attributes were actually assessed in any detail. He also points out there is a research shortage on graduate recruitment and selection.

Carless reports on a similar Australian study based on interviews with graduate recruiters in Australia (N=50) across public and private sector employers in a wide range of industries (2007). She finds the most common selection techniques used are the application form and interview, with 42% relying on these alone. Other techniques are assessment centres, and personality/ability tests. This can be readily compared with the findings in this case study in Chapters 6-9.

One of the earliest UK studies to look at selection techniques for graduate recruitment is provided by Keenan (1995). He used a questionnaire of employers (N=536 from a 35.7% response rate) to find that a major task was the initial sift, to reduce the volume of applications, described as “...an administrative nightmare” (1995, p. 303), to a more manageable size. 94% of graduate employers used an application form for this, and 54% used screening interviews during the initial sift. Later studies show the “milk round” has declined but fairs and phone interviews have increased (Branine, 2008; Pollard *et al.*, 2015). 44% used assessment centres and virtually all used interviews in the final selection. Approximately a third of assessment centres included personality tests, aptitude tests, and/or group discussions and a smaller number utilised in-tray exercises. References only tended to be used after offers were made, and were limited to issues like reliability and integrity. Keenan found that recruiters were often not trained, pre-screening was not done systematically within companies, and that choice of selection methods were not

based on proven validity of approach. This gives credence to the argument that it may be incorrect to assume employers are able to identify applicant skills accurately, and that much of the selection process may be based on “gut instinct” (Harvey, 2001; Brown, Hesketh and Williams, 2004). In this case study the chapters on interviews and the emotional landscape present findings on similar issues.

More recently Pollard (2015) provides a comprehensive account of techniques used by employers in selecting graduates, including a description of the different stages of selection and rationales as to why various techniques are used. The information is drawn from in-depth phone interviews with 76 graduate employers, which allows a greater depth of information than Branine, though with fewer employers.

Predominantly qualitative in nature, Pollard’s study has the advantage of being one of the most recent studies, UK based, and drawing on a relatively large group of employers. The interviewees were drawn from a purposively constructed sample of 200 companies across 10 sectors and four size classifications, and therefore could be considered a good representative sample. Most importantly, it specifically focuses on selection techniques, making it a very relevant paper.

The importance of sifting has only increased since Keenan’s paper from 20 years earlier, due to the increasing number of graduates (ONS, 2017). School results, degree classification, and phone interviews are all used for this stage. The milk round has decreased in importance, but online interviews including pre-recorded “video interviews” are now part of the sifting landscape. Application forms are key, but used more systematically as they are generally mapped against competencies important to the employer. All the assessment day activities identified by Keenan are still used, supplemented by role-plays, simulations and presentations. Online tests continue to be important, despite doubts about validity, and are often outsourced and used for sifting purposes with specified “hurdle rates” (Brown, Hesketh and Williams, 2004).

An important change since Keenan’s study is the rise of the SME²² as a graduate employer, a natural consequence of the increasing number of graduates in the absence of an equivalent increase in traditional graduate roles on the demand side.²³ They are less likely to use application forms and more likely to rely on CVs and covering letters for the initial sift. They are less likely to use assessment centres, and often go straight to interview with, on average, one other activity required. Stewart’s focus on SMEs and graduate selection finds they look for similar skills to larger organisations, but are less concerned with leadership potential and more concerned with an ability to “...hit the ground running” (2000b, p. 36). This is attributed to the fact they are less likely to have a comprehensive graduate development scheme. However, according to commentators writing only a few years later, large companies also now expect graduates to be able to contribute swiftly and are more reluctant to

²² Small Medium Enterprise

²³ See Brown’s (2004) criticisms on the government merely “hoping” for an increase in highly skilled knowledge worker roles, and the cascade effect of employment for graduates where supply “outstrips” demand (Beaudry, Green and Sand, 2016; Reinhold and Thomsen, 2017b).

see training and development as their responsibility (Brown, Hesketh and Williams, 2004; Tymon, 2013).

In all cases, and this is unchanged since 1995, the most important element in final selection is the interview (or interviews), even though there is a growing body of literature questioning the validity and objectivity of interviews (Keenan, 1979; Anderson and Viv Shackleton, 1991; Silvester *et al.*, 2000; Morrison, 2014; Cutts, Hooley and Yates, 2015). Many argue that there is a strong link between interview performance and social background, as applicants need to demonstrate they “fit in” with the “aesthetics of employability”, and many students recognise this reality (Brown, Hesketh and Williams, 2004; Holden and Hamblett, 2007; Tomlinson, 2008; Morrison, 2014; Cutts, Hooley and Yates, 2015). As will be seen, the dominant use of interviews in this thesis matches the results of this case study²⁴.

Branine, Carless, Keenan and Pollard all use the employer’s/recruiter’s perspective to identify graduate selection techniques, and they all focus on the discourse of what employers say they do, as opposed to identifying what they actually do and how that is perceived by the graduate.

This thesis enables a different perspective by studying the actual lived experience of recent graduates, deepening our understanding of the nature of the transition to work experience.

A large scale quantitative study

Jackson’s (2013) quantitative analysis of factors influencing the chances of graduates being in full-time work provides a different approach to looking at a similar question. At N=56,000 (graduates of Bachelor’s degrees across all subjects), this is one of the largest studies available. She uses the Australian equivalent of the UK DLHE and NSS²⁵ surveys to create a list of variables measured in these surveys, and then uses regression analysis to measure which factors had a positive impact on the likelihood of being in full-time work 4-6 months post-graduation. The findings are fascinating. The single most important factor is the graduate use of traditional job search techniques (responding to adverts, online searches and approaching employers and agencies) which increased the chances of being in full-time work by 184%, with the next most important being networking (53%) and attending an elite university (37%). In other words the top three factors arguably have little to do with what happens at university or with the presence of work skills. In terms of factors more directly linked to the university experience, the impact is much more modest. Skills development at university increased the chances by 19%, suggesting that skills may not be as important in gaining work as employer surveys indicate. Course quality impacted at 18% and the use of the university-based careers service by 14%.

While Jackson’s study does not look at selection techniques at all, it does measure the impact of factors on the likelihood of gaining full-time work in actuality. It is therefore

²⁴ See Chapter 9 on interviews.

²⁵ National Student Survey – an annual survey of student satisfaction with their higher education experience.

measuring what employers seem to use de facto to make hiring decisions, as opposed to the official discourse expressed through employer surveys.

The findings suggest, perhaps disconcertingly, that the university student experience has only a modest impact on employment outcomes, even if the course is of high quality and skills development is included. Far more important are background issues ie the status of the university and the networks of graduates, indicating structure rather than agency is much more important in labour market outcomes.²⁶ But intriguingly, the most important factor by far is the use of traditional job search techniques. The more actively engaged graduates are in traditional job-hunting the more likely they are to be in full-time work. Others have also found job search intensity and proactivity to be important (Saks and Ashforth, 1999; Werbel, 2000; Brown *et al.*, 2006; Manroop and Richardson, 2016; Okay-Somerville and Scholarios, 2017; Mowbray *et al.*, 2018). Simple and obvious, one might say. Perhaps agency triumphs after all. In this study I share findings on digital signalling and the use of technology by the Participants which extends our understanding beyond traditional job-hunting techniques.²⁷

Selection in action studies

We finally move on to the most similar studies of all, that I have named “selection in action” studies. By this I mean direct observations of actual selection processes, whether that observation is by the researcher or by Participants who provide evidence as witnesses of specific selection processes. This is therefore very different to surveys of employers or graduates on their general opinion of skills needed.

Humburg (2015) provides a fascinating insight with a choice experiment carried out with 903 employers. Employers were presented with a range of CVs and asked to select who they would invite to a first interview. The hypothetical successful applicants were then allocated an assessment day report of their skills and this was given to the employers for a hypothetical hiring decision. Humburg analyses the results to determine the importance of different signals. The results were perhaps surprising with one year’s relevant work experience being important, but two years being less helpful, and a not insignificant minority preferring no work experience at all (partly contradicting the studies that show the importance of internships). Studying abroad was of very limited value, as was a Master’s or a 1st class degree, though having results of above average (ie a 2:1) was important. High scores on the interpersonal skills tested at the assessment day, however, were very relevant.

Humburg’s work is similar to this project in that it is one of the few focused on what employers look for in practice in recruiting new graduates. However, it was purely hypothetical, whereas this study looks at what graduates were actually asked to demonstrate.

²⁶ Though networking can be agency based according to the Participants who largely see it as a merit based skill as discussed in Chapter 12.

²⁷ See Chapter 11 on digital signalling.

Rivera (2015) provides one of the most similar studies. ~~Sh~~He reports on an 18-month field study of the recruitment practices of elite companies at elite universities in America, and supports a largely Bourdieusian conclusion of graduate success. Almost ethnographic in nature, Rivera immersed ~~her~~himself in the process by becoming a member of a corporate recruitment team and was therefore able to report in detail on the actual decision-making experience. Therefore ~~her~~is aim, like mine, is to understand what actually happens in the selection process and the decision-making related to hiring new graduates.

However, my study differs in a number of ways, and is therefore able to add to the literature. It is not investigating elite practices per se, but rather all employers this group of graduates applied to. It is set in the UK rather than the USA, and it explores the recruitment experience from the recent graduate's perspective rather than the hiring managers'. It should therefore add something original to the literature.

The most similar study to this project, and probably one of the most important in the UK on graduate selection, is Brown's *The Mismanagement of Talent* (2004). This thorough and provocative work studies the recruitment and selection process for graduate recruitment schemes in the UK from both the employer and applicant perspectives. Over a two year period Brown interviewed N=60 graduate applicants, N=15 companies and N=10 policy makers. He was given access to N=6 assessment centres (where the majority of elite graduate employers test the attributes of applicants), during which he observed "wash ups" which is where the decisions on hiring are made.

Similar to Rivera, the focus is on elite jobs and companies, and he was able to observe decision-making in action. His overall finding is also similar. Decisions are highly subjective, though cloaked in a discourse of competency-based analysis. He concludes "*no matter how much they try and dress up their decisions in the paraphernalia of science it often boils down to a subconscious feeling of which candidate one would rather work or socialise with*". (Brown, Hesketh and Williams, 2004, p. 187)

Due to congestion in the labour market, and the high level of similarity between applicants, companies are able to demand more and more attributes including those relating to personality and emotion. He comments "*...the majority not just an elite few are assumed to require a list of personal capabilities which in a previous life may have resulted in canonisation*". (Brown, Hesketh and Williams, 2004, p. 91) He argues there is now a new discourse which he calls "*...the new technology of rejection*" and notes that "*There are now almost infinite grounds on which people can be legitimately rejected*." (Brown, Hesketh and Williams, 2004, p. 187) The nature of the congested market, the need for en masse rejections, and the impact on new job-hunters is discussed in Chapter 13.

However, unlike Rivera he extended his study to interviews with applicants. These were recent graduates, all of whom made it through the pre-selection sift and 80% of which had made it to the final round of selection. He interviewed them on their lived

experience, focusing specifically on how they prepared for interviews. He finds about a third of them see the process as a signalling game, and try to give the signals wanted by the employers so as to win a positional advantage. He calls these “players”. Another third he labels “purists” who see the process as a genuine search for merit and finding a suitable match between graduate and company, and therefore approach the interviews more “authentically”. Another third lie in between these two approaches. The approach of the Participants in this case study to “playing the game” is explored in Chapter 10 on indirect signalling, and shows some similarities to Brown’s findings.

Brown’s in-depth analysis of applicants has many similarities to my own study. It explores the perspective of recent UK graduates, and investigates their lived experience of the transition to work. However, as with Rivera it is focused only on elite jobs and companies, and specifically on graduate schemes, which is only a very small subset of graduate employment destinations in the UK (AGR, 2016; Department for Education, 2017c). It also only looks at how applicants prepare for interviews, and not about other techniques used to assess skills and attributes. The techniques are mentioned, but listed rather than explored.

My study looks at all employers this group of graduates applied to, and is not limited to elite employers. It also explores all techniques experienced by these graduates, and is not limited to assessment days and interviews. It stresses factually what was experienced, rather than how they chose to prepare. For these reasons it should extend our understanding of the graduate selection process, with potential implications for signalling theory, as well as for the design of undergraduate education at university. In the next section I turn to signalling theory.

Signalling, human capital and positional conflict theories

Signalling theory has been chosen as a suitable theoretical framework for this empirical study partly because the concept of signals sought and given resonates strongly with the central research question (this is in essence a study of signals involved in job selection in the transition to work of business graduates), but also because it can provide a flexible elucidatory perspective that allows integration with the closely associated theories of human capital, positional conflict and credentialism. Therefore although the main theoretical lens selected for this dissertation is signalling, there will be reference to these other key theories.

The seminal work on signalling theory is Spence’s *Job Market Signalling* (1973) for which he ultimately won a Nobel prize. It has fostered a huge body of literature across many disciplines, and this thesis focuses on only a sample of that which relates to graduate recruitment, and knowledge gaps identified by researchers.

Signalling theory explains the mechanism used by decision-makers in a market of imperfect information. In this instance, employers are trying to judge which applicants would be the most productive for their business. They cannot tell productivity levels until they actually employ people, so in order to make a decision

they look for proxy information that suggests a higher likelihood of productivity than a competing applicant. This proxy information is a signal. Higher education has traditionally functioned as an important signal that indicates productivity (Akerlof, 1970; Spence, 1973; Lofgren, Persson and Weibull, 2002).

It is important to clarify that if employers knew for certain the future productivity levels of each applicant, they would not need signals as they would have perfect information instead. As Spence explains, signals are used in markets of imperfect and asymmetric information. Signals are therefore not “the thing” sought itself, but an indicator that the applicant might have “the thing”. The stronger the signal, the greater the chance you have “the thing” being sought.

It is submitted that this explains why work experience is so important in graduate selection, and why employability skills teaching in university is not. Work experience is much closer to “the thing” required here – productivity in a work environment. In fact if the work experience is as an intern for the company making the selection itself, it almost is “the thing” and therefore closer to perfect information than almost any other signal one can imagine. However, employability skills “taught” at university are a long way from “the thing”. Work experience is a very strong signal, as a result, and initiatives such as HEAR (HEA, 2015)²⁸ would always be a very weak signal (Pollard *et al.*, 2015), and completely ineffective if every student had one. Even if the work experience is with another employer, it operates as a strong signal as it means another employer thought the applicant worthy of employing – an endorsement signal as it were.

Despite the fact that Spence’s original article specifically uses graduate recruitment as the example in setting out his theory, researchers say that more understanding of the way signals work in the recruitment process is needed, and I argue especially in securing first graduate jobs (Richards, 1984a; Steffy, Shaw and Noe, 1989; Saks and Ashforth, 1999). Celani (2011) notes that more empirical and theoretical insights are needed on how employers use signals from applicants to make selection decisions, Velasco (2012) that the hiring process of undergraduates is hardly researched, and Bangerter (2012) that more is needed on how signals work in personnel selection, especially in relation to the educational “arms race”. This study is intended to make a contribution to this gap in the literature.

Bergh (2014) argues that there is insufficient work elucidating Spence’s notion of a separating equilibrium, of relevance here because separation is essential in order to make decisions about who gets the job.²⁹ Spence (2002) explores types of equilibriums, looking at the different forces that create pooling equilibriums (distinguishable groups of indistinguishable applicants) and separating equilibriums (distinguishable groups of individually distinguishable applicants). Creating a separating equilibrium is the whole point of signalling and graduates are encouraged to use signals to “stand out from the crowd”. This study explores how “stand out” is

²⁸ Higher Education Achievement Report, a UK wide government initiative to create a record for every student of their achievement in, amongst other things, certain skills. See <http://www.hear.ac.uk/>.

²⁹ See Chapter 14.

achieved using a portfolio of signals, and how both pooling and separating equilibriums play a crucial role in post-graduation job selection.³⁰

This connects to Connelly (2011) who suggests one area of future research should be the use of a portfolio of signals rather than the single signal of the degree. I propose that the skills and attributes graduates present to employers are effectively a portfolio of signals that have become known as “employability”. The concept of a portfolio of signals is therefore explored in this study, construed as a mix of “position and possession” signals (Holmes, 2013), the intended and unintended, the explicit and implicit.³¹

Finally, some have criticised the literature as being too focused on statistics, econometrics and mathematical models, and disconnected from the real experience of job-hunting (Manroop and Richardson, 2016; Marginson, 2017). Manroop states *“To date, job search scholarship has been dominated by a functionalist-positivist approach using statistical techniques and exploring cause-effect relationships between variables. While such approaches are useful they offer only a limited view of the job search phenomenon. What is needed is a deeper understanding of different aspects of job search experiences”*. (Manroop and Richardson, 2016, p. 222) This case study assists by being completely focused on the lived experience of job-hunting.

Related theories

There are three other theories that are closely associated with signalling theory.

Firstly, Bourdieu theory argues that there is a strong link between social class and occupational outcomes and that education can be seen as a mechanism for reinforcing class privilege by cloaking this privilege in apparent merit (1977; Bourdieu and Passeron, 2000; Sullivan, 2002; Boden and Nedeva, 2010; Burke, 2015). This is also known as positional conflict theory as it is closely connected to the concept of higher education as a positional market, and the nature of structural limitations impacting the progression of graduates (Calhoun, 2006; Marginson, 2006, 2016a; Moreau and Leathwood, 2006; Brown, Lauder and Ashton, 2011; Lauder *et al.*, 2012; Clark and Zukas, 2013; Brown, 2018).

Others argue education is a force for social mobility, and a way of transcending class origins (Dearing, 1997; Archer and Davison, 2008; CBI, 2009; Browne, 2010; Clements and Dean, 2013; Basit *et al.*, 2015; BIS, 2016a). The latter is generally connected to human capital theory in assuming that education promotes the acquisition of skills needed by employers, and therefore improves career progression and is largely a result of individual agency and proven merit rather than societal structure (Becker, 1994; Tholen, 2015; Burke *et al.*, 2017). It is also argued that education acts in both ways (Sullivan, 2002).

³⁰ See Chapter 14.

³¹ See in particular the sections on “What employers are looking for” in Chapters 7-8, “Discussion topics” in Chapter 9, and Chapter 10 on indirect signalling.

The third theory is credentialism, essentially a type of educational qualification arms race (Bills, 2016; Brown, 2016; Brown *et al.*, 2016; Tholen, 2016). This posits that due to massification, a somewhat pejorative word that describes the increased democratisation of higher education, degrees are no longer the signal they once were, but need to be supplemented with other signals (eg further qualifications, skills, work experience, or even such irrelevancies as sport) some of which may be more about social reproduction than productivity (a Bourdieusian perspective) or simply additional criteria to help pragmatically sift the “administrative nightmare” of large numbers of applicants (Keenan, 1995). This leads to concerns in many countries of “over-qualification” and “underemployment” (Becker, 1994; Mantze Yorke, 2003; Brown, Hesketh and Williams, 2004; Nilsson and Ellström, 2012; Chan and Lin, 2015; Beaudry, Green and Sand, 2016; Yunus and Hamid, 2016; Burke *et al.*, 2017; Reinhold and Thomsen, 2017a; Liu, 2018). This is discussed in Chapter 14.³²

A number of commentators ask for more research on linking signalling with other theories (Celani and Singh, 2011; Hussey, 2012; Bergh *et al.*, 2014; Rospigliosi *et al.*, 2014; Marginson, 2017). Nilsson (2017) links these four theories together (signalling, human capital, Bourdieu, and credentialism) in order to attempt to explain graduate outcomes in Sweden. He argues more work is needed of both a quantitative and qualitative nature on understanding the competencies required for jobs as graduates struggle to gain a firm foothold in the labour market.

This study is focused on exactly this, and while it mainly concentrates on signalling theory it does look at the links with human capital, positional conflict and credentialism. All appear to be useful in understanding the phenomenon of the transition to work of recent graduates.

Contribution

Taking into account the review of existing research most closely related to my research question and the deployment of signalling theory, I now outline what I see as my contribution to the field, and how this thesis fits within the extant literature.

This study sits within the graduate “selection in action” literature, as a subset of the graduate recruitment and selection research. It is positioned at the intersection of employability, skills, and pedagogy, and underpinned by the conceptual framework of job market signalling and its closely related theories of human capital and Bourdieusian positional conflict theory.

This study contributes to the theoretical literature by investigating how and what signals are actively sought by prospective employers in their selection practices. This dissertation, therefore, is not about employability per se, nor is it about skills development. It is about the reality of early-in-career job-hunting and job selection of recent business graduates.

³² See the sections “Exit blocked” and “Zero sum game.”

There is a gap in the research on understanding the reality of the graduate job selection process, and few studies on “selection in action” related to recent graduates. The results of this study have potential implications for our understanding and use of signalling theory, in particular the use of portfolios of signals to create alternating and conflicting pooling and separating equilibriums in graduate selection, as well as its links with other theories. Additionally, there are implications for professional practice and policy. The theoretical and professional implications are discussed in Chapter 14.

In the next chapter I explain my research design and methodology.

Chapter 4 – Research Design and Methodology

Introduction

This project is an in-depth exploration of the transition to work experience of early-in-career business graduates from one higher education provider. It is specifically and only from the perspective of the graduates. It uses interviews and surveys to explore the job application and selection process as actually experienced by them. It collects information on both successful and unsuccessful applications and explores what employers asked the graduates to do during the job-hunting process. In particular it focuses on what activities and assessments were used during the selection process to decide on job offers ie what proof points employers required in terms of skills, knowledge and attributes. Thematic coding is used to analyse qualitative data, and descriptive statistical reporting is used for quantitative data.

This chapter explains the methodology used for this project. The first section describes the overall approach and this is followed by the research philosophy and a brief explanation of case studies as a research tool. The next section looks at the data used for this dissertation and covers the type of data collected, and how it was collected and analysed. I then look at ethical considerations and validation techniques appropriate for this type of study.

Overall approach

This dissertation is a mixed methods single site case study and follows what Creswell calls a convergent fixed design (2011).³³ As is characteristic with this typology, the qualitative and quantitative data are collected concurrently, meaning the collection of one type is not dependent on first collecting the other.

The quantitative data was collected primarily in the “phone surveys”³⁴ of N=47 Participants. The phone surveys looked at their overall job-hunting experience. The qualitative data was collected primarily in the “research interviews”³⁵ of N=23 Participants (a subset of N=47) and focused on a small number of job applications in detail for each Participant, as well as their perspective on their overall experience. But both collection methods collected both types of data.

Data sets are analysed and presented separately though side-by-side in the findings chapters. Some of the qualitative data was transformed into quantitative data for further integrated analysis. For example, the number of times networking was used emerged in the research interviews and was then converted to descriptive statistics³⁶. This establishes a partly interactive relationship between the two types of data rather than a fully independent one (where the analysis is completely separate). In this way

³³ Also known as a convergent parallel design or a triangulation design, Creswell 2011

³⁴ This phrase is used to distinguish these surveys from other surveys mentioned in the literature review, such as surveys of employers.

³⁵ This phrase is used to distinguish the interviews carried out by the researcher from interviews experienced by Participants in their job-hunting.

³⁶ See Table 11, Table 12 and Table 13

the qualitative and quantitative data sets are merged in the analysis. All data is then connected during the interpretation and analysis stage as the findings are explored. What is known as the “point of interaction” of qualitative and quantitative data is therefore in the presentation, interpretation and analysis stages (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011).

Typically in a convergent design quantitative and qualitative data sets are given equal priority, but in some cases, including this project, a greater emphasis may be given to one over the other (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2007). Here, qualitative data has a greater emphasis, given that the primary focus of the research is exploring and understanding the lived experience of the Participants in their post-graduation job-hunting.

This leads on to the question of the justification for using a mixed methods approach. For this study the purpose is to obtain different but complementary data and thereby benefit from the strengths of both qualitative and quantitative methods (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011).

The quantitative data allows an understanding of the nature of the job-hunting experience as a whole for the Participants, and the prevalence of various selection activities. This includes statistical data such as how many job applications were typically made, and how many Participants experienced specific recruitment techniques (eg teamwork exercises). This sheds light on what employers look for in practice. This quantitative data therefore provides a big picture of the phenomenon of the university-to-work transition.

The qualitative data then allows exploration of the process in detail from the individual Participant’s perspective, including what they experienced, how they interpreted this experience, and their views on what employers were seeking. The data sets are then synthesised to develop a much more complete understanding of the transition to work of this population, and reported in the findings chapters.³⁷ The qualitative data illustrates aspects of the quantitative data in detail, and the quantitative data allows the qualitative data to be understood in the overall context of the phenomenon of job-hunting.

Finally, it was not feasible to interview Participants about every job application they had made. Therefore the research interviews focused on approximately three applications per Participant, choosing their current role and those where they experienced a number of selection activities. The phone survey, on the other hand, collected information on the total number of applications and activities. This allowed me to build a clearer picture of the overall experience.

Research philosophy

This project is underpinned by a pragmatic philosophy, as is typical of mixed methods approaches (Creswell, 2009). Crotty speaks of the “great divide” (2012) (see also

³⁷ Chapters 6-13

(Pickard, 2008)) in approaches to research being that between constructivism (there is no objective reality but only what is perceived) and positivism (there is an objective reality that may or may not be as it is perceived). However, pragmatism is not committed to one ontological system of thought on the nature of reality. Instead it embraces the concept of an objective reality external to the mind (a positivist approach eg how many employers required a presentation) but that reality is always understood through subjective experience (a constructivist approach eg how did the Participants feel about those presentations). This somewhat goes against Crotty's view that to be coherent research projects should be embedded in either one or the other (2012), but Creswell argues that a combined approach, provided it is rigorous, provides a fuller picture of the phenomenon being studied (2009).

This project combines both, though it is primarily constructivist oriented. The whole concept of signalling theory, after all, is about the perception of senders and recipients of signals in the context of asymmetric and missing information (Akerlof, 1970; Spence, 1973). Reality is only somewhat objective, as it can only be understood within societal and historical contexts and by reference to multiple perspectives, here being the transition experience as articulated by the Participants. For a pragmatic philosopher *"truth is what works at the time: it is not based on a dualism between reality independent of the mind and within the mind"* (Creswell, 2013, p. 28).

This then leads on to the epistemological assumptions in this project ie how can knowledge be known. Pragmatism assumes that knowledge is known through both subjective (inductive) and objective (deductive) means and therefore the researcher is free to choose multiple methods of data collection and analysis, as best suits the research question. Here I combine qualitative and quantitative data in order to more deeply understand the phenomenon. The quantitative data reveals "objective" realities such as the number of jobs applied for and if Participants had to demonstrate certain skills (eg teamwork). The qualitative data provides insight into the lived experience of the transition and the "hows" (eg how were they expected to demonstrate teamwork) and their individual perspective on this experience.

The project is therefore largely inductive as selection techniques, experiences, feelings and interpretations emerged during the data collection based on the articulated lived experience of the Participants. It is important for the qualitative researcher to remain open to unexpected results and emerging themes (Mason, 2009). That was certainly the case here, and the emerging themes of the job-hunting experience are shared in Chapters 11–13, as well as the discovery of the "other activities" presented in Chapter 8.

However, there are also elements of a deductive approach. By using information from the literature review on the main skills and attributes required by employers, I posited that employers would test for signals that show graduates have those main skills and attributes. This assumption formed the basis of many of the questions in the phone survey. For example, Participants were specifically asked about how many presentations, written exercises and teamwork exercises they completed, as these

were key skills identified by employers. The results on the use of these “specified activities” are shared in Chapter 7.

Ultimately, I am looking for a contribution to the problem of what universities can or should do to help with the employment of new graduates, using signalling theory as a useful lens. In a pragmatist approach, knowledge is fundamentally about finding that which is useful; that which solves a problem. Therefore pragmatist research tends to focus on the outcomes of the research and the solution to problems. The professional implications for the results are therefore discussed in Chapter 14.

Case studies

I have described this project as a single site case study, raising the question of how a case study is defined and why it is appropriate for this research project. There is no agreed definition of the term case study, nor does it have a set technique or format (Stake, 2013; Yin, 2018). There are many views, and this study relies primarily on Yin and Creswell, two of the most cited writers, for an understanding of case study research.

Yin defines a case study as an “...*empirical method that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the “case”) in depth and within its real world context*”. (Yin, 2018, p. 15) The case can be many things such as a person, organisation, event or process. Creswell uses Yin’s definition and says it should have clear boundaries, use multiple sources of data, collect in-depth information, and report both an overall case description as well as themes relevant to the research question.

Here the case is a particular experience – early-in-career job-hunting – of business graduates of a particular institution within a particular time frame. The site, the timeframe and the type of graduate provide the boundaries for the case.

Case studies are most often qualitative in nature, and are especially useful where an in-depth understanding of a contemporary phenomenon is sought, here the in-depth details of the job-hunting experience of recent business graduates. This is the sort of detail that cannot be readily captured by surveys and quantitative data. Case studies are also useful where the context cannot be controlled, and instead the phenomenon being studied is situated within an uncontrolled real world context. This can be contrasted with the experiment as a research methodology, where typically the context is controlled in a laboratory so that causation of particular variables can be assessed. Here graduates take part in the real world job-hunting experience, which cannot be controlled by the researcher (or the institution or Participants). A case study is also useful where it is the most practical method to gather the data to answer the research question (Yin, 2018). Here there are no other records or obvious method to find out the details of the job-hunting experience of this set of Participants. The most practical option seems to be to ask them.

Although case studies are generally qualitative, they can include quantitative elements. This case study includes a phone survey with a number of quantitative questions, as well as quantitative analysis of some of the qualitative answers from the

research interviews. This enables reporting on the prevalence of some features that helps in describing the overall case. Providing a holistic overview of the case is an important part of the findings for a case study (see Chapter 6), alongside in-depth analysis (Creswell, 2013).

Case studies can be exploratory, descriptive or explanatory in purpose (Yin, 2018). This one is primarily exploratory and descriptive. The research question indicates we want to explore the details of the transition to work experience, and describe it for this particular case. It is not so concerned with explanations of causation and therefore not an explanatory case study.

Stake (Stake, 2013) also draws a distinction between intrinsic case studies where the main and enduring interest is the case itself, and instrumental case studies where the purpose is to shed light on something beyond the case. This is an instrumental study as I am interested in the transition to work experience of all graduates and the link to signalling theory, and this case is chosen as the vehicle for illuminating these two elements.

The research question asks for a detailed understanding of the post-graduation job-hunting experience, from the perspective of recent graduates. This is a contemporary phenomenon, set in an uncontrolled real world context, requiring in-depth exploration and is therefore well suited for a case study.

Types of data collected

By definition a mixed methods study means that there must be at least one qualitative strand and one quantitative strand incorporated into the project (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2011). For a qualitative study, interview and focus group data are the most common (Mason, 2009) and interviews are used in this project. For a quantitative study, surveys with closed questions enabling statistical reporting are common, as is used here with the phone survey.

The following data was collected for analysis in this project:

Phone survey data

The purpose of the phone survey was to obtain an overall picture of the Participants' post-graduation job-hunting experience. The relevant population was all the degree graduates of the single site who graduated between 2014 and 2017. The questions generated primarily quantitative data but there were also a number of open questions that generated qualitative data. The output was a phone survey record for each respondent, which was then converted to a number of Excel worksheets and tables summarising the responses and calculating the data where possible. The full population of relevant graduates was invited to take part, making this an attempted census approach. The sample is comprised of those that agreed to participate.

Research interview data

Face-to-face research interviews on a one-to-one basis explored several specific examples of a job application process in detail for that Participant, and a range of

other questions on their experience. As is typical for qualitative research, these were informal and semi-structured. Interviews were chosen as a data collection method so as to understand the detail and nuances of the Participant's experience, and because the information and such detail are not readily available in any other format (Mason, 2009; Yin, 2018). The output was transcripts and audio files of each interview, and Excel worksheets and tables summarising some of the data.

Data collection

The case focused on the experience of the first 100 graduates of the site, and therefore a population of 100 potential Participants was identified. All members had graduated with an honours degree in Business. All members were asked to participate using a variety of contact methods including email, LinkedIn, announcements at alumni events, and newsletters, with an aim of reaching a 50% response rate. There was a 47% response rate and therefore this created a sample of N=47.

The phone survey was highly structured with many closed questions, and some tightly focused qualitative questions³⁸. It was designed to capture quantitative data on their overall job-hunting experience, a list of what was required to secure their current role, and to gather information on their experiences during degree study relevant to obtaining work.

Participants in the phone survey were asked if they would be willing to take part in a longer face-to-face interview in order to discuss their experience in more detail. N=23 Participants participated in the research interviews.

The research interviews were mainly carried out at the site in central London. One was on Skype³⁹ and two were held in a regional town close to the Participants' workplace.⁴⁰ Participants were given the option of location, but most were willing to come to the site.

They were all held on a one-to-one basis and recorded (sound only). I held all the research interviews myself which were semi-structured and followed a 10-question plan⁴¹. Note that for reasons explained below under "the interviewers" the initial phone survey was carried out by a research assistant.

In accordance with advice on qualitative semi-structured interviews (Creswell, 2013), I kept the research interviews flexible. This meant that the same question order was not always followed as I endeavoured to respond to issues as and when they came up rather than interrupt the natural flow of the Participant. I memorised the questions and took very few notes in order to maintain eye contact and interest, and therefore encourage sharing by the Participant.

³⁸ See Appendix 4 for the phone survey instrument.

³⁹ Pz.08#

⁴⁰ Pz.16#, Pz.11#

⁴¹ See Appendix 5 for the research interview instrument.

Data analysis

Phone surveys – primarily quantitative

The phone survey responses were captured as a phone survey record (Word document) for each Participant and then transferred on to an Excel worksheet divided into columns for the various questions. Much of this was countable data (eg the number of job applications made) but there were also open questions that generated qualitative data that was then converted in to countable data where possible. For example, respondents were asked to describe any internships they undertook while studying. The descriptions were put in one column and a new column next to that was created to record whether they had had an internship or not. This yes/no column thus became countable data.

This enabled the prevalence of various activities/features to be counted and averages and ranges to be calculated. This information underpins information such as that found in Table 3 and Table 5.

Research interviews – primarily qualitative

The research interviews generated qualitative data, firstly in the form of recordings and then transcripts. The 23 transcripts were uploaded to NVivo⁴² and analysed using both thematic and open coding. Pre-set codes were created using the interview questions, which enabled first stage thematic auto-coding. Initial thematic codes were also created for expected activities such as interviews and presentations. Open coding was then used to allow further themes and activities to emerge during analysis such as networking and digital signalling (Yin, 2018).⁴³

An important aspect of a qualitative study of this kind is to allow the Participants to use their own voices (Creswell, 2013). The actual words of the Participants on relevant themes, for example in describing role-plays, are the data. Therefore I have made extensive use of direct quotes in the findings chapters supplemented by the endnotes. The exercise of coding the transcripts enabled me to identify all the descriptions given of certain themes (eg online tests) and draw on them heavily in the presentation and interpretation of the findings.

Integrated analysis and interpretation

It was also possible to take some of the qualitative data in the transcripts and convert it to quantitative data to enable a clearer grasp of the big picture. For example, it became apparent that a number of Participants had used recruiters in some way during their job-hunting experience. I was able to count the number of times this was used in various applications and turn this into statistical data. Descriptive statistics were thus generated on many of the activities and themes and shared in the relevant findings chapters.

One example of this qualitative–quantitative data conversion was the creation of a worksheet that looks at the data from a job applications’ perspective. During the

⁴² NVivo is a qualitative data analysis computer software package.

⁴³ For samples of coding please see Appendix 7 and for a list of nodes Appendix 8.

research interviews Participants were typically asked to describe three application processes in detail, and everything they had to do (whether the application ended in a job offer or not). This was not only transcribed qualitatively, the information was converted to countable data and entered onto an Excel worksheet. This recorded information such as what activities the application required (eg a presentation, a written exercise, an interview etc), whether it was a graduate scheme, and whether it resulted in a job offer. The phone survey respondents were asked what activities were required for their current job, and these were added to the applications worksheet. The use of excel enabled me to look at the overall data from both a Participants' perspective and an applications perspective.

As a result, data was generated that provided at least some information on N=101 job applications. This includes N=32 graduate scheme applications, N=54 successful applications and so on. This underpins a number of tables such as the results in Table 6, Table 7 and Table 8.

This combination of qualitative and quantitative data can be seen throughout this dissertation, as is appropriate in a mixed methods study. For example, the chapter on networking shares statistics on how often it was used, and for which types of job applications. This sits alongside a wealth of rich detail in the form of quotes from Participants on the networking techniques they used and their feelings about doing so.

Therefore a feature of this dissertation is the integration of qualitative and quantitative data during the interpretation and analysis phases (Creswell, 2013). Specifically, some of the qualitative data was transformed into quantitative data to enable an overall picture of the job-hunting experience to be measured, and thereby supplement the in-depth understanding of individual experiences gained in the qualitative analysis.

Ethical considerations

There were three main ethical considerations for this dissertation:

Consent

Attempts were made to contact all of the first 100 graduates of the site, using a range of techniques. By coming forward and agreeing to take part they were consenting to participate. During the phone survey the purpose of the research was explained again, and permission to use their data was requested and agreed. At the start of the research interview permission to record was asked and granted, the purpose of the research explained in more detail and that their direct quotes would be used. Key to their consent was that on publication their names would be confidential in reference to quotes, as would any mention of specific companies. Therefore codes have been used for both the Participant names and the company names⁴⁴.

⁴⁴ The protocol for codes is explained at the start of Appendix 1.

Fair reporting of Participant views

An important ethical issue for a study of this kind is that data is not distorted and a fair view of the Participants' perspectives is captured. Therefore interviews were recorded for the purpose of an *aide memoir* and transcribed to ensure accuracy of recollection. Contemporaneous notes were made of the phone surveys and the phone survey records were completed shortly after the phone calls. These protocols helped ensure the accuracy of the data. The validation techniques described below helped ensure that the analysis and reporting is as fair and accurate as possible.

The interviewers

One ethical consideration was the extent to which I should carry out the phone surveys and research interviews, or whether to use a research assistant. I was both the researcher and also the Principal of the site, and therefore known by many of the potential Participants⁴⁵. This could affect their answers as they may not feel they could be completely open, or they could seek to make a particular impression, whether intentionally or not (Creswell, 2013). However, as this is a doctoral thesis it was important that I carry out most of data collection myself. I decided on a pragmatic approach, in keeping with the research philosophy. The initial phone survey was carried out by a research assistant in order to encourage candour from the Participants in the first phase of data collection, and I carried out all the research interviews myself.

Evaluation and limitations

Three standard ways of evaluating the quality of research are to look at its validity, reliability and generalisability. However, the evaluation of qualitative research is not straightforward as there is no agreement that these three measures are appropriate. Positivist and post-positivist approaches to research, generally supported by quantitative methodologies, have standard and scientifically oriented evaluation techniques such as statistical tests, repeatable experiments, and double blind trials. In contrast, the very terms "validity, reliability and generalisability" are often rejected by qualitative researchers as it has a different purpose and to attempt to use similar techniques can be viewed as undermining its central tenets (Creswell, 2013).

In other words, it can be argued that to judge constructivist-based predominantly qualitative research (as we have here) by mechanisms developed primarily for positivist-based largely quantitative research, inevitably makes the former look like a poor substitute for the latter. Instead qualitative research should be recognised for its own strengths and characteristics and be judged accordingly.

There are many perspectives on how this alternative approach to evaluation can be done, and there are no universally agreed techniques (Creswell, 2013). Given the constructivist philosophy that lies behind much qualitative research, perhaps this plethora of viewpoints is inevitable and appropriate.

⁴⁵ This is discussed further in Chapter 5 under "the researcher".

Some researchers deliberately reject any form of validation for qualitative research (Woolcott, 1990; Creswell, 2013). Others use the terms validity, reliability and generalisability but adapt their meaning (Lather, 1991; Yin, 2018). And others change the terminology to emphasise issues like trustworthiness, confirmability and credibility (Guba and Lincoln, 1985). A range of evaluation approaches have therefore emerged. Creswell outlines several strategies and recommends using at least two as appropriate for the study (2013). I have borrowed from Creswell and Yin to address these concepts.

Validity

Several strategies have been used to ensure validity for this project:

Thick description

One of the primary techniques is the use of “thick description” (ie heavily detailed) (Ponterotto, 2006; Geertz, 2008) especially in the form of many direct quotes from the Participants, using their words rather than my interpretation of their words. Thick description is also seen in the comprehensive account I give of the various selection activities⁴⁶ in the findings chapters, drawing on both qualitative and quantitative data. This level of description should help the reader to assess whether the conclusions drawn are valid. I also attempt to summarise the range of experiences for each activity, and not just give the “typical”. This makes the description “thicker” rather than reducing it to a “mean”.

Triangulation through multiple viewpoints

It is important to remember all the data was collected from graduates. This was because of the research gap identified in the literature on how the job application process is actually experienced by recent graduates. However, I have used a relatively large number of Participants for an in-depth study of this kind, with 23 research interviewees (whereas the recommendation for qualitative interviews is typically 12–15)⁴⁷. For each, I asked about several job application experiences. This means I am able to collate multiple experiences into an overall picture of the case that is not unduly dependent on any one individual. Altogether I obtained data from N=47 phone survey respondents and N=23 research interviewees, on N=101 job applications (not all complete), across N=75 companies. Therefore, although this is only a single site case study, the research design ensured multiple perspectives and experiences were used.

Systematic summaries

For a number of the activities I created tables summarising each example of the different experiences to ensure that I was genuinely seeing the overall picture. For example, in the Table 15 there is a row for each reported instance describing a presentation. I could therefore check my personal impression from reading all the data against a more objective framework. See other examples in Table 8, Table 10

⁴⁶ Teamwork, presentations, tests, other activities etc.

⁴⁷ There is no agreed correct number but see these examples: Creswell (2013) pg 157 says 4-5 cases; Latham (2013) 11 interviews; Crouch & McKenzie (2006) 20 maximum; Guest, Bunce, and Johnson (2006) normally 12, although some of these are based on concepts of saturation which was not used here.

and Table 14. The point is that I used these tables to capture every instance, not just a selection of instances that happened to match my expectations. This enables greater objectivity.⁴⁸

Negative case analysis

Negative case analysis is where the researcher is explicit and open about themes/findings that do not match their original expectations. Here I created initial codes for the selection activities I expected to find (based on the skills identification literature) eg teamwork, presentations, and tests. This is presented in Chapter 7. But I also endeavoured to remain open to other techniques and activities that I had not foreseen, coding every instance I found. This led to Chapter 8 on “other activities”. It also led to Chapters 10–13 on indirect signalling, digital signalling, networking and the emotional landscape. I expected there to be some “other activities” (even though I did not know what they would be) and specifically asked about “any other activities” in the phone survey, but the latter four chapters were all unexpected, and emerged only during analysis. They are dependent on me “noticing” them, and no doubt someone else reading the transcripts would have picked up other themes as well.

Openness about researcher perspective

Openness about the researcher’s perspective, expectations and interests is another technique utilised in this project. This is often encouraged in case studies as the researcher inevitably brings their perspective into the project, and therefore one should be open about this. This is especially important here given my relationship with the site. I have therefore included a section on this in Chapter 5. Additionally I deliberately use the first person and intrude my presence into the chapters from time to time. I do not want the reader to forget that I am interpreting everything I see and hear, and am therefore intentionally open about what I expected and what surprised me. I describe my initial expectations in Chapter 5 as part of this validation technique.

According to Creswell (Creswell, 2013), all case studies in the end are a representation by the author of the case, and are never wholly “objective”. Nonetheless, as Yin (Yin, 2018) states, one wants to be as objective as possible. Validating research of this nature is about being open about potential bias and issues, rather than pretending to eliminate them, and providing enough information and data (such as the systematic summaries and the extensive use of quotes described above) so that the reader can clearly follow the data, logic and reasoning and decide themselves if the conclusions are valid.

Reliability

Traditionally, reliability is about the ability to repeat the research and get the same results, and is associated particularly with the repeatable experiment mode of research (Yin, 2018).

However case studies, being the in-depth study of a case within its real world context, are not generally repeatable in the same way. In a case study the context is

⁴⁸ Note that complete information was not collected on each one as the information collected depended on what was shared in interviews.

uncontrolled and always changing, unlike in the repeatable experiment held in controlled laboratory conditions (Yin, 2018). Furthermore, case studies, including this one, tend to be about revealing the richness of the phenomenon, and providing an in-depth understanding of its complexity and nuances. They are about discovering the range of different experiences. Therefore, were you to carry out the “same” study at another site you would not expect the same results. Nor would you regard the first site’s results as unreliable simply because they differed from the second site. Instead, both sites would add to the richness of our understanding of the phenomenon.

In short, technical notions of reliability do not sit easily with case studies, and Creswell (2013) summarises literature that rejects measures of reliability altogether. Instead he says that reliability should refer to the “accuracy” of the data and its interpretation. Yin (Yin, 2018) agrees that case studies can rarely be repeated, and instead suggests being explicit about methods and providing sufficient data for readers to see how you reached your conclusions. Therefore throughout the report I give numerous references to the data that supports the findings (including in the endnotes), and utilise a number of tables of systematic summaries of key elements, as described above.

Specific reliability issues are as follows:

Questions

If the survey and interview questions are not readily understood then the answers collected could be misleading and difficult to interpret. Therefore the proposed questions were tested with a small number of colleagues to ensure that as far as possible they were clear and free from ambiguity. However, Stake (Stake, 2013) recommends not devoting much time to this as it does not add a great deal of value to a qualitative study, and instead the researcher should stay flexible and responsive to emerging issues.

I followed a 10-question plan for the research interviews, but many sub-questions emerged. For example, once I realised that many Participants had used networking in various ways, I started to ask about it as a sub-question of *“Tell me about your overall approach to job-hunting”*. I have aimed to be clear in the findings where an issue emerged during data collection, and therefore was not necessarily asked about with all Participants. In these situations, the number of examples reported would be a minimum only. For example, 40% of Participants mentioned undergoing an asymmetric video exercise, but such exercises were not specifically included in the questions. Therefore more than 40% may have experienced them. In contrast, everyone was asked about the number of presentations they had to give. Therefore that statistic should be more complete.

Coding

Coding is another challenge for reliability as by definition it requires interpreting the answers given in the interviews and surveys, and categorising them into certain themes. Given the research question with its focus on specific job selection activities, this was often relatively straightforward. For example, when a Participant described a teamwork exercise this was coded as teamwork. However, other codes were more ambiguous, such as the various emotions expressed. The use of thick description and quotes and systematic summaries, helps with the reliability of coding (Ponterotto, 2006; Geertz, 2008; Yin, 2018). Additionally there was only one coder (me) so there is at least no issue of intercoder reliability (Creswell, 2013).

Self-reporting

An important issue that affects reliability is that both the research interviews and the phone surveys are based on the non-contemporaneous recollection of the Participants. Although they were encouraged to take their time in answering, the statistics in particular can only be very approximate. They may also have forgotten certain experiences, or misremembered details and feelings. It is also possible that some reports may be untrue. Answers were accepted as given, and there was no mechanism used for checking the truth of the reports.

Because self-reporting poses a challenge for reliability, the researcher will often undertake observations in a case study to help triangulate the information. That was obviously not possible here as I was not able to attend and observe the job interviews. Note that in the Brown (2004) and Rivera (2015) studies they were able to observe assessment centres. Rivera actually participated in the process. That was not feasible here, but in any case I wanted to get a picture of the overall job-hunting experience from the Participants' perspective, not just a picture of how one particular application worked. For this study, interviews and surveys that covered multiple applications was the most practical means of collecting the data. The problem of self-reporting is partially dealt with by using multiple Participants and reviewing multiple job applications for multiple companies.

Generalisability

It is important to bear in mind that the statistics are descriptive only. They describe the transition to work for these 47 Participants. They are not intended to be statistically generalisable. The Participants are a sample of the first 100 graduates of the site, but they are not a random sample. They were self-selecting, in that they were the ones that it was possible to contact and that agreed to take part. Attempts were made to invite all 100, but not everyone had up-to-date contact details or attended events or received newsletters. Therefore we cannot assume that the Participants are statistically representative of the full 100, nor of the site as a whole, and certainly not of business graduates in general.

Furthermore, the Participants did not all graduate at the same time and the data collection was carried out over the course of a year. This means that they were not all at the same temporal place in terms of job-hunting at the point of data collection. The findings therefore cover a broad time period – their early-in-career job-hunting

experience – though most were still in their first post-graduation role. Of the 29 in full-time permanent employment, only seven were in their second graduate role.

The information gathered, both qualitative and quantitative, describes the rich range of activities business graduates experience in job-hunting. It is only suggestive of the prevalence of such activities. Further research on a much bigger random sample would be necessary before inferences could be made about a larger population on the prevalence of the various activities.

However, Yin (Yin, 2018) draws a useful distinction between statistical generalisability and analytical generalisability, and explains that qualitative case studies are generalisable to theoretical propositions, even if not to populations in a statistical sense. This means they can be used to contribute to theories, to review existing studies, to identify new areas for research, and to contribute to an understanding of concrete situations related to the phenomenon being researched. This is particularly so in an instrumental case study which has an interest in looking beyond the case itself. Yin refers to this type of generalisability as “*lessons learned*”. The case study researcher can use these lessons learned to make an argumentative claim, rather than a statistical claim, that is supported by evidence from the case study as a whole. I endeavour to do exactly this in Chapter 14.

Conclusion

This chapter reviewed the methodology used in this dissertation, including the overall approach and philosophy, how the data was collected and analysed, and ethical and evaluative considerations. It is now time to define the case itself, before presenting the findings.

Chapter 5 - The Case

Introduction

This chapter provides particulars of the case and its boundaries. The first section defines the case before going on to look at its three core elements: the site, the leader, and the Participants. The focus is on details that are of direct relevance to the research question.

Defining the case

This project is a single site case study of early-in-career job-hunting based on a set of 47 Participants from one particular institution. A case study is “...an empirical method that investigates a contemporary phenomenon (the “case”) in depth and within its real world context”. (Yin, 2018, p. 15) The case should be specifically identified and have clear boundaries (Creswell, 2013). A case can be many things, typically a person or an organisation, but can also be a more intangible concept such as an event or process (Creswell, 2013; Stake, 2013; Yin, 2018).

Here the case is a specific experience, being the early-in-career job-hunting experience of a particular set of recent business graduates. The case is therefore not the site or the individual Participants as such, though they help bound the case. It is the transition experience itself. The phenomenon being studied is the university to post-graduation work transition, and this particular case has been chosen to shed light on this phenomenon.

The case has the following boundaries:

Location: all the Participants are graduates of a single site, described below under “the site”.

Time period: all Participants graduated between 2014 and 2017.

Type: all Participants are business graduates and described in more detail below under “the Participants”. Business management is a particularly appropriate subject for this research as it is a generic subject rather than a subject needed for a specific job (such as veterinary science) and therefore enables a broad view of employer requirements. Despite being generic it is also one of the most popular subject for undergraduates, such that I sometimes refer to it as the modern day liberal arts degree.

The case has three key constituent elements: the site, the leader (who is also the researcher), and the Participants.

The site

All the Participants are graduates of a single site, being a small, new, private provider located in central London, codenamed Pinetree⁴⁹. In many ways this is a unique organisation, quite different to the traditional well-established universities. It is the

⁴⁹ All Participants and companies, including the site, have been anonymised.

first higher education provider to be embedded in a global FTSE 100 company, and sees its academic community as comprising teachers, students and its business partners. It has collaborated with a wide range of companies in the design and delivery of all its programmes since its inception, and attracts students because of its industry focus. Understanding some of the details of the site, its leader and its students is important for understanding this case study. Such details have undoubtedly influenced the project and its findings in multiple ways.

Pinetree was incorporated in 2012, as a not-for-profit wholly owned subsidiary of a large global education company. It took its first pilot group of 20 students in September 2012. It now has two schools, a business school⁵⁰ and a school for creative industries, and approximately 1200 students on a mix of undergraduate degrees, Master's degrees and short courses. It offers courses in business management (with specialisms in law, finance, entrepreneurship, marketing and global industries), law, and accounting as well as visual FX, animation, compositing and gaming.

Its first undergraduate students graduated in September 2014, and by September 2017 100 students had graduated from PBS.⁵¹ This group is known as 'the first 100 graduates' and formed the potential census group for this study.

Mission and strategy

Pinetree's strategy, marketing and pedagogy has been centred on employer engagement since its inception. It works with a range of employers in the design and delivery of all its degrees, and has a strong extra-curricula programme of employer-focused activities such as industry days, business challenges, social enterprise projects and internships. Its overall mission is to integrate academic study and employer engagement for both the intellectual and professional benefit of its students.

This means the students experience many traditional elements you would see in most universities such as lectures, tutorials, exams and coursework, validations, mapping standards against the FHEQ⁵², regulatory approvals, typical teaching terms and 14 hours per week classroom contact time. The site has its own permanent academic staff, with an average of 10 years Higher Education teaching experience, supplemented by a range of associate lecturers.

However, Pinetree also works closely with employers on many aspects of the student experience, and its academics on average also have approximately 10 years of industry experience. Every degree has been designed with employers (as well as academics and students), and employers sit on its governing body and academic board. Each term features numerous opportunities for authentic engagement with employers such as industry days, hackathons, business challenges, workshops and guest speakers. The reader will see some of these mentioned by Participants.

⁵⁰ Pinetree Business School, referred to as PBS in this thesis.

⁵¹ Note there are no graduates as yet from the UG programmes in the creative industries school.

⁵² Framework for Higher Education Qualifications (QAA, 2008).

Pinetree has a “start-up in residence” (as other organisations may have a visiting professor or an artist in residence) which is a real company but also operates as an authentic learning resource for students. Pinetree guarantees internships on many of its programmes, has a talent development director rather than a careers centre, and works with approximately 20 companies on degree apprenticeships, which Pinetree sees as a particularly strong example of academic-professional integration.

The physical learning space is set within one of the main London buildings of the corporate owner, and the look and feel has been designed to resonate with the atmosphere of a modern day start-up or SME.

In summary, Pinetree aims to become a university that is embedded physically and intellectually within the modern day professional world. It sees employers as a learning resource that can be woven into the fabric of the undergraduate learning experience and used to help students develop academically, professionally and as critical citizens of society. This can be seen in an extract from Pinetree’s strategy:

*“Pedagogically we want to combine the expertise of our academics with the expertise of experienced professionals to create a demanding and relevant learning experience and to support scholarship and research relevant to our mission. This is a multifaceted area, and for us it means much more than just ‘employability’. High quality employer engagement should help students to develop professionally, of course, but just as importantly it stretches them academically and intellectually, and can be used to develop an understanding of civic engagement and corporate responsibility (Pinetree, 2017)”.*⁵³

Regulation and approvals

Pinetree works with a university partner on a validation model, as it does not have its own degree awarding powers. It designs and delivers its own courses, but at present the final degree is conferred by a validating university who has overall responsibility for the quality and standards of the programmes.

Pinetree has a wide range of approvals necessary to operate as a higher education provider in the UK. It is designated for student loans, which means students can apply for loans to pay for tuition and maintenance, and it passes an annual review by the UK regulator (the QAA). It is also accredited by professional bodies in law, accounting and management (ACCA⁵⁴, CIMA⁵⁵, SRA⁵⁶ and CMI⁵⁷), and approved to deliver degree apprenticeships by the ESFA⁵⁸. It has not applied for Tier 4 status, which means it does not take international students. Up until recently it has been categorised as an “alternative provider” under UK Higher Education regulation, but has recently been

⁵³ The information provided here on Pinetree can be found in its official strategy (Pinetree, 2017) and the reports and minutes that go to the Governing Body. However, as the institution has been anonymised it is not appropriate to provide them.

⁵⁴ Association of Chartered Certified Accountants, a professional body for accountants.

⁵⁵ Chartered Institute of Management Accountants, another professional body for accountants.

⁵⁶ Solicitors’ Regulation Authority, the professional body for solicitors.

⁵⁷ Chartered Management Institute, a professional body for managers.

⁵⁸ Education and Skills Funding Agency.

accepted on to the register with the OfS (the new regulator for UK HE), under the “approved fee cap category” with no special conditions. This is the same category for traditional universities, and there is no longer a category of “alternative provider” as the new regulatory regime endeavours to create a more level playing field in the sector (OfS, 2019d).

Structure and finances

Pinetree is unusual in being a wholly owned subsidiary of a global corporate, and has been set up as a separate non-profit legal entity. Although a subsidiary, it nonetheless has a high level of autonomy protected by its own governing body with a majority of external fully independent non-executive directors who have final say on its overall management and strategic direction.

Pinetree is financially supported by a significant corporate undertaking from its corporate owner, and goes through an annual budget process which must be approved by both its governing body and its corporate owner.

Pinetree’s purpose is not to expand significantly, but it is expected to reach its own financial independence and approximately 2000 students within 10 years of starting. “Return on investment” for the corporate owner will be achieved not through a direct financial contribution (as a non-profit entity any surplus must be reinvested in Pinetree), but rather through knowledge and expertise it has built up that will enable Pinetree to help its corporate owner develop products and services for other institutions, and for which Pinetree would receive an appropriate fee. Part of this expertise is on effective employer engagement in degree education.

Students

Most students apply in the traditional way through UCAS, are in the 18–21 year age bracket, and study full-time over three years on a primarily face-to-face model. The main reasons they give for choosing Pinetree are its industry contacts, the internship scheme and the central London location. About 20% of students of PBS are now degree apprentices with a range of companies such as BBC, L’Oreal, Guy’s Hospital, Red Carnation Hotels, Unilever, IBM, and so on.

Based on the most recent data, the percentage of PBS graduates with a good honours degree was 68% in 2017 and 77% in 2018. The DLHE employment rate was 100% for 2017 and 94.8% for 2018. The highly skilled employment rate was 90.6% for 2017 against a benchmark of 65.8%, and 80.4% in 2018 against a benchmark of 68.5%.

In summary, Pinetree has fulfilled all the regulatory requirements for a higher education provider, has been operating and growing for six years, and is now officially in the same regulatory category as the vast majority of traditional universities. However, in other ways it is a unique institution. It is the only business school that is a subsidiary of a FTSE 100, it is very small (the average UK university is 17,000 students), intends to stay small, and is very new. Its distinctiveness lies in the depth and breadth of its employer engagement, and most students choose to come to Pinetree because of this industry-focused approach. This narrative of industry

connectedness can be seen in many of the comments from the Participants in this thesis.

The researcher

One of the recommended validation techniques for a case study is to be open about the role of the researcher and their perspective, interests, and expectations (Creswell, 2013). I have chosen to include this in this chapter as I am part of the site. Being an insider as a researcher is an accepted practice in qualitative research, with both advantages and disadvantages (Becker, 1958; DeWalt and DeWalt, 2010; Yin, 2018). The main issue is potential bias, and therefore openness is particularly important to protect against this.

I am the Principal and founder of Pinetree, and am therefore known to the Participants, although I do not have a very close relationship as I have never taught them or been their personal tutor. It is possible that my role may have influenced answers in subtle ways, such as trying to make a certain impression or not wanting to be candid about some issues. In fact, the Participants seemed to me remarkably generous with their openness, something the reader can judge for themselves in the quotes given in the ensuing chapters. I did detect one Participant who seemed to want to create an impression of great success, but otherwise the engagement felt very genuine. This was possibly helped by the fact most questions were about their practical experiences in job-hunting and not about their experience at PBS as such. Nevertheless, the reader should bear in mind my relationship to the site and the Participants.

As Principal and founder I have been at Pinetree since its beginning and was asked to join Pinetree's corporate owner for the specific purpose of setting up a new higher education provider that would in time become a university. Therefore, in conjunction with colleagues, I very much devised the strategy and mission outlined above. This shows my strong interest in the integration of academic study and professional experience. I am very interested in how employer engagement (especially internships and similar) can help students develop not only professionally but also academically. I see employers and the world of work as a learning resource that can be used to help students in many ways. Employer engagement is not just about improving employment chances, it also provides students with the opportunity to develop intellectually and as critical citizens.

Much of the student experience is based on authentic opportunities to engage with a range of employers. This is a very deliberate strategy and based on the reading I did in preparation for setting up Pinetree which showed that the most effective type of employer engagement was to create real opportunities, rather than have "employability courses" taught by academics and the like. In particular, internships and work experience are very effective in not only enhancing students professional trajectory but also helping them do better academically.⁵⁹

⁵⁹ See Chapter 2 and the section entitled "Work experience literature".

I should say that I am very sceptical of the term “employability”, and of employability “courses” that can be “passed” and of employability “badges”. However, I am very interested in employment, and hence the aim of this case study is to learn about how business graduates secure employment. Any notion of “employability” that is separate from employment to my mind is not particularly useful. I have a bias towards the real thing – authentic employer engagement, and actual employment.

I have an interest in developing expertise in the university-to-work transition, as it reflects the mission and strategy of Pinetree. I also believe the way people secure work is a very important phenomenon in modern society with significant repercussions for social justice, diversity and innovation. I undertook this case study after reading the literature and realising that while we knew a great deal about what employers want from graduates, we knew much less about how recent graduates get jobs in today’s market.

Upon reflection I have been able to identify four key expectations I had at the start of this project:

1. An expectation that employers would test for the skills they say they need. There are numerous surveys about what employers seek in new graduates. Much of this is skills-based and after synthesising key skills from the literature I based the phone survey questions on the assumption that these would be tested in some meaningful way by employers.
2. An expectation that the degree was of importance and interest to the employer. Given that so many jobs require a degree and that people with degrees have considerably enhanced chances of employment in highly skilled work and with above average pay (Department for Education, 2017d), I expected the nature of the degree would be of great import to employers. After all employers prefer graduates and are willing to pay a premium for them (Department for Education, 2017f), and therefore must be interested in what they have learned and how well they have done. Presumably they prefer degrees that include more of the skills that they need, and therefore would be interested in the content and grades. At Pinetree we invest a great deal in the design of the degrees and involve employers and academics in a whole series of workshops prior to validation. We have even won a finalists’ award with Advance Higher Education for our collaborative approach to design.
3. An expectation that the process of job-hunting would be familiar – that it would look rather like my own experience with some additional assessment activities. I also expected that it would follow a reasonably standard pattern across the Participants.
4. An expectation that the findings on how candidates are assessed by employers would provide useful and practical ideas that could be used to develop the student learning experience, in ways that are befitting to a prospective university, and are rational and ethical.⁶⁰

⁶⁰ By which I mean I did not expect ideas to enhance employment would necessarily pose ethical dilemmas, but as will be seen a number of ethical questions arise. See for example the references to “value snap” in Chapter 10 under “Demonstrating values”.

As will be seen, although these expectations were fulfilled in some ways, in many ways the findings were not at all what I expected. I spent much of my time during data collection and analysis in a state of fascinated surprise and occasional mortification.

The Participants

The case focuses on the transition experience of 47 Participants.

Course details

All Participants graduated between 2014 and 2017 with an honours degree in Business. PBS has offered a range of business programmes over this time, and in contacting students the aim was to ensure at least one example of the different types of courses was included, specifically at least one of each of the following: full-time, part-time, two-year accelerators, degree apprentices, top-up degrees and full three-year degrees, as well as a range of specialisms, and this was achieved.

Academic results

In terms of results, 47% were granted a 1st, 40% a 2:1, 11% a 2:2 and 2% a 3rd. This is therefore an academically high performing group.⁶¹ However, as explored in Chapter 9 it was found that grades were never discussed during the job application process. Based on this evidence their main role seems to be in the initial sifting for some applications, and then at most applicants needed a minimum of a 2:1.⁶²

Extra-curricula activities

As described above under mission and strategy, the extra-curricula employer engagement activities are an important part of the student experience at PBS. Participants were not specifically asked about what extra-curricula activities they undertook while studying, though many of the quotes mention industry days, hackathons, workshops, entrepreneurial tutors, and social enterprise projects. However, in the phone survey they were specifically asked about internships, work experience, volunteering, setting up their own businesses, and whether they had participated in any of these during their studies.

⁶¹ Note that the academic standards are governed by the validating partner who also appoints the external examiners and runs the exam boards.

⁶² Note that a number of employers are now reducing their minimum requirements (even the need for a 2:1) despite the increasing applications in order to be able to consider a more diverse range of applicants (Burt, 2017a).

Table 1 summarises the responses:

Table 1 shows activities during studies. N=47 Participants.

Activities	Number
Internship	27
Work experience	20
Set up own business	8
Any work ie internship, work experience, or own business	40
Volunteered	21
Any work or volunteering	42

89% participated in at least one of these activities, and on average over two, probably indicating a very proactive group of students.⁶³ This would make sense given the mission of the site and the reasons students give for choosing to study there.

Another example of proactivity demonstrated by these Participants relates to the extensive use of networking discussed in Chapter 12. It is likely that these Participants may be particularly strong on networking in comparison to other graduates. This is firstly because students choose Pinetree for its business contacts and are therefore perhaps more pre-disposed to networking. Secondly these particular Participants were those it was possible to contact and who were willing to engage. Much of this contact was through LinkedIn and events and therefore arguably attracted more networking-oriented graduates.

One can therefore see a pattern emerging for these Participants of high performance and proactivity. 87% were granted a 2:1 or a 1st, 89% participated in some sort of work experience or volunteering, and over half described using networking techniques in their job-hunting. This may not be at all typical for business schools more generally. As explained in the methodology chapter, this is not a random sample of Participants and the results cannot be used for statistical inferences to the wider

⁶³ In one large survey of 18,000 students just under half had completed an internship or similar cf 57% here (High Fliers Research, 2016). In another survey of over 2000 students 59% did some sort of work while a student cf 85% here (Gil, 2014)

population. However, the focus of this case study is on the activities they were required to do as part of the job application process. These activities are predominantly designed and set by the employers⁶⁴, and are the same for all applicants. Therefore the experience of these Participants is valuable in strengthening our understanding of the nature of the phenomenon being explored here: the job-hunting experience of recent graduates.

The findings chapters

Having defined the case and its constituent elements of the site (the institution), the researcher (the leader of the site), and the Participants (the students of the site), I now go on to present the research findings.

The findings are presented in chapters 6-13, and fall into two broad movements. Chapters 6-9 focus on the selection activities set by employers. Chapter 6 provides an overview as to the prevalence of the various activities, and chapters 7-9 provide in depth detail as to the nature of these activities. These chapters are predominantly about sharing the findings but there is some analysis and discussion included in each. These chapters are broadly about answering the first research sub-question: *“What were the specific job selection activities and assessments set by employers as experienced by the Participants?”*

Chapters 10-13 have a different feel. These chapters address themes that emerged during analysis, and deal predominantly with the more unexpected findings. This includes the approaches undertaken by the Participants rather than those set specifically by employers, as well as the emotional landscape for job-hunting. These chapters have more discussion and analysis, but still contain substantial and important findings about the post-graduation transition experience. These chapters collectively are broadly about answering the second research sub-question: *“What other actions did the Participants undertake in their attempt to secure work and what other themes emerged that help us understand the phenomenon of early-in-career job-hunting?”*

⁶⁴ Chapters 10-12 explore activities largely undertaken by the Participants rather than explicitly set by employers.

Chapter 6 - The Overall Findings of the Case

Chapters 6-9 are the first set of findings chapters and focus on the first research sub-question: *“What were the specific job selection activities and assessments set by employers as experienced by the Participants?”* They are predominantly about sharing the findings on selection activities but there is some analysis and discussion included in each.

Introduction

This chapter presents a summary of the data collected and the overall findings on the selection activities experienced by the Participants. We are not concerned with detail of the selection process here but the range of activities and how frequently they were encountered. This allows us to view the “typical” journey from several different perspectives.

The data

The findings are based on 70 data gathering discussions held with 47 Participants. This was made up of N=47 phone surveys and N=23 face-to-face research interviews. The following information was collected:

- Data on the overall job-hunting experience of N=47 Participants.
- Data on 101 specific job-finding processes comprising N=96 job applications and N=5 self-employment examples across 75 employers. Note this is not always complete data for the full process.
- Complete data on N=66 job applications (not including self –employment examples) of which N=54 were successful (ie ended in a job offer) and N=12 were unsuccessful. “Complete data” means the full application process was discussed with the Participant.⁶⁵
- Partial data on a further 30 job applications. This was partial generally because the Participant was rejected early on in the process and therefore could not discuss the full requirements for that employer.
- Data on N=64 general job applications and N=32 graduate scheme applications.
- Data on N=10 job applications where Participants withdrew or rejected a job offer.
- Data on N=108 examples of selection activities (not including tests) and N=71 interviews.

This allows the overall job-hunting experience to be viewed from several different perspectives, as described after the section on current activity.

Current activity

Table 2 shows the current activity of the Participants at the phone survey, updated at the research interview if applicable.

⁶⁵ Though it is always possible that Participants may have forgotten some stages in the process.

Table 2 shows the Activity at the time of phone survey or research interview. N=47 Participants.⁶⁶

Activity	Number
Employed FT permanent.	25
Graduate scheme	4
Self-employed	4
Contractor	4
Employed PT	1
Intern	1
Studying	1
Studying and self-employed	1
Studying and employed	1
Job-hunting	5
Total	47

Of the 29 full-time permanent employees, 22 were still in their first post-graduation permanent role and seven were in their second.

On average, Participants applied for 40 jobs and received 3 job offers, an 8% success rate. It is also a 92% failure rate. Rejection is a strong feature of the transition experience as discussed in Chapter 13.

9/23 (40%) research interviewees reported declining offers or withdrawing from an application.⁶⁷ This would be a minimum number as declines/withdrawals were not specifically asked about, but emerged during data collection.⁶⁸

The mean perspective

Firstly we can look at the statistics on the average experience.

⁶⁶ Note that all categories of participant experienced job applications. For instance, just because someone is currently self-employed or studying does not mean that s/he had not applied for jobs. This case study is about their overall job-hunting experience and therefore includes all their applications and not just their current activity.

⁶⁷ See Table 14

⁶⁸ Note that the phone survey respondents reported three job offers each on average. Presumably these cannot all have been accepted and therefore the percentage of Participants who declined a job offer is likely to be even higher. Given the competitive nature of the contemporary job-hunting landscape, this high prevalence of declines and withdrawals is curious and worth researching further.

Table 3 summarises the overall mean average experience. Phone survey respondents were asked about their whole post-graduation job-hunting experience and the number of applications that required the various activities. For example, on average Participants experienced tests in six of their applications, and a teamwork exercise in only one application.⁶⁹ Note I have classified the CV/application form and interview as the “traditional selection methods” to be contrasted with “assessment activities” which covers everything else.

The table shows that the graduate job-hunting experience entails a wide variety of activities and that, on average, each Participant experienced each type of activity.

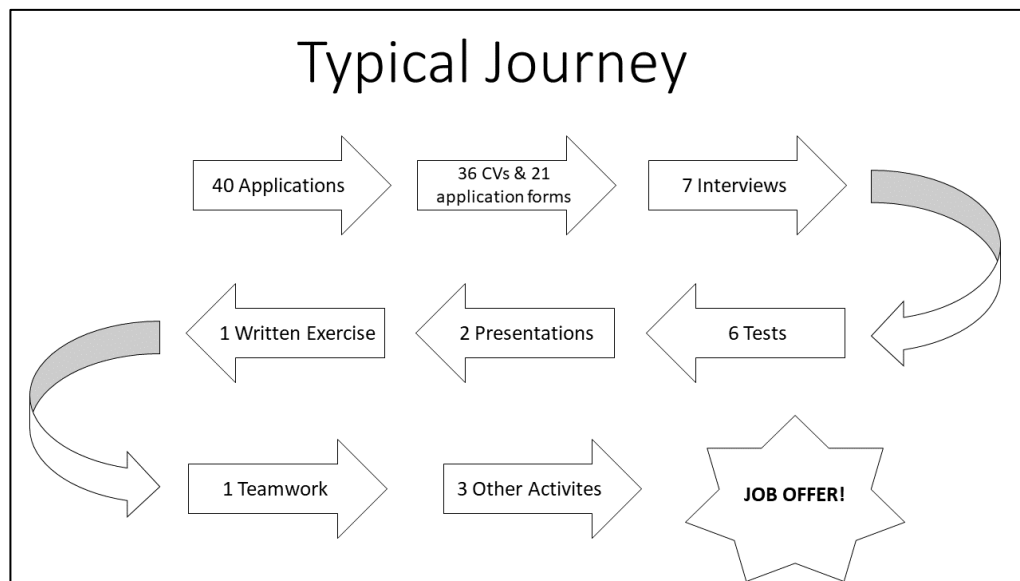
Table 3 shows for each Participant how many job applications on average required the various activities. It also shows the range. N=47 Participants.

Activity	Mean	Range
Making a job application	40	0-390
Traditional techniques		
CVs	36	0-390
application forms	21	0-390
Interviews	7	0-30
Assessment activities		
Tests	6	0-50
Presentations	2	0-13
Written exercise	1	0-9
Teamwork	1	0-11
Assessment days	1	0-15
Any of above 5 activities	3	0-5
Other exercise	2	0-10
Job offers	3	0-12

⁶⁹ To clarify: if one application required two presentations this would appear as “1” for these tables.

This average overall journey is presented in the following flowchart:

Table 4 is a flowchart showing the typical journey of a Participant using data from Table 3



But is this really the typical journey? Although the mean average indicates that overall everyone experienced everything, the range shows that there is great variation by individual. In fact there is not a single Participant who experienced the mean average journey.⁷⁰ One notable finding for this case study is how very individual the transition journeys were.

The percentage of Participants perspective

Another way to look at the “typical” journey is to consider the percentage of Participants who experienced each activity. Table 5 shows this, arranged from those activities experienced by the most Participants to the least. This is not about how many times they experienced the relevant activity, but whether they experienced it at all. For example, 51% of Participants experienced a written exercise at least once. The top two of CV/application form and interview clearly dominate, which is an interesting finding in itself. Although employers report concern on the lack of skills, they still primarily use the traditional selection methods that do not directly assess most of those skills⁷¹. The top assessment activity is the online test. Apart from teamwork exercises, all the assessment activities were experienced at least once by more than half the respondents.

⁷⁰ Note that all Participants are included in the data and outliers are not removed. This is because the case is about the experience of *all* the Participants, with unusual examples being relevant. It is not a statistical calculation where outliers would need to be removed.

⁷¹ See the discussion on the “signalling spectrum” in Chapter 14.

Table 5 shows how many participants experienced the various activities both by Number and Percentage. In order of most to least. N=47 Participants.

Activity	Number	Percentage
CV/application form	43	91%
Interviews	42	89%
Job offers	42	89%
Tests	35	74%
Presentations	31	66%
Written exercise	24	51%
Assessment days	24	51%
Teamwork	20	43%
Any of above 5 activities	42	89%
An "other exercise" ⁷²	39	83%

⁷² As other exercises are a combination of many different types of activity they have been put at the bottom of the tables despite appearing as a high percentage.

The successful application perspective

Successful applications

Another viewpoint is to focus on successful applications ie those that ended in a job offer. Sufficiently detailed data was collected on 54 successful application processes. Table 6 shows the percentage that required the various activities:

Table 6 shows the percentage of successful applications requiring activities. N=54 successful applications with sufficient data. The final column is the percentage of Participants that experienced the activity (taken from Table 5 above where N=47 Participants).

	Number	Successful Applications Requiring	Cf Percentage Participants Experienced (Table 5)
CV/application form	46	85%	91%
Interview	46	85%	89%
Presentation	19	35%	66%
Test	13	24%	74%
Assessment day	12	22%	51%
Written exercise	11	20%	51%
Teamwork	9	17%	43%
Other exercise	29	54%	83%

This shows a marked difference between the overall job-hunting experience and what was relevant for securing actual job offers. For example, 74% of Participants experienced tests but that was only relevant for 24% of successful applications. Oral presentations were the most common assessment activity for successful applications (cf tests for the overall job-hunting experience) but were still only experienced in 35% of cases. For successful applications the interview and CV were even more dominant in comparison to other assessment activities than in the overall job-hunting experience.

The graduate scheme v general jobs perspective

It is also possible to look at the successful applications from the perspective of comparing graduate scheme requirements with those for general jobs.

Table 7 shows the difference in required activities between graduate schemes and general jobs, including the percentage of each. N=54 successful applications, N=8 Graduate and N=46 General.

	General	Graduate	General %	Graduate %
No. successful applications	46	8		
Interview	38	8	83%	100.00%
CV/application form	38	8	83%	100.00%
Presentation	11	8	24%	100.00%
Written exercise	8	3	17%	38%
Test	6	7	13%	88%
Teamwork	1	8	2%	100.00%
Assessment day	4	8	9%	100.00%
Other exercise	25	4	54%	50.00%

It seems that the graduate schemes are more homogenous in their application process than the general jobs, and also use many more assessment activities. The traditional selection techniques very much dominate the general job application processes.

Conclusion

These are descriptive statistics only, and not intended to be inferential as explained in Chapter 4 on methodology. However they do show a rich variety of activities used in the graduate job-hunting landscape, and an equally rich variety of individual journeys. These results also show that what is most important in terms of preparing students for the university-work transition varies considerably depending on whether one focuses on general jobs or graduate schemes and the overall experience or a subset of that experience that is more likely to lead to jobs offers.

Having presented the overall findings, I now move on to explore the selection activities in detail. Note that they have been grouped into several types. The “specified selection activities” are those that were specifically asked about during the phone survey; tests, presentations, written exercises and teamwork exercises. These will be discussed in the next chapter. Participants were then asked if they had experienced “any other selection activities”. This was an open question, and the findings on this are presented in Chapter 8. The traditional selection methods of the interview and CV/application form are then discussed in Chapter 9.

Chapter 7 - Specified Selection Activities

Introduction

During the data collection, Participants were asked about the extent to which they experienced certain activities namely: tests, teamwork exercises, written exercises and presentations. These activities were specified in the survey questions based on what one might expect to see in the selection process given the results of the employer surveys and what they say they are looking for in graduates.⁷³ As these were specifically nominated in the questions, they are called “specified activities”. This chapter presents the detailed findings on these specified activities.

During the phone survey Participants were asked about how often they experienced the specified activities in their overall early-in-career job-hunting experience, as well as whether they were used for securing their current role. This provided information on how often they were experienced.

During the research interviews Participants were asked about three application processes in detail, including their current role. This provided qualitative information on what these specified activities were like.

The results are presented below. The section on each activity provides statistical information on the frequency of their use, a description of what these activities typically look like, how the Participants experienced these activities, and what they thought the employers were looking for.

Online tests

The first finding is the prevalence in the use of tests as a selection method by employers. Apart from the use of the traditional selection methods of interview/CV, this is by far the most common selection activity. On average each Participant experienced tests in six applications, making it almost as common as interviews (cf seven⁷⁴). 74% (35/47) of graduates experienced application processes that required tests, with a range of 0-50.⁷⁵

Tests therefore appear to have become the single most important non-traditional selection method.

However, the picture changes significantly when one focuses on what was needed to secure a job offer. Of 54 job offers only 24% required tests and if one ignores graduate scheme offers this reduces to only 13%.⁷⁶ However almost all (88%) of the graduate schemes use tests.

⁷³ See Chapter 3 and the section on “Skills identification and graduate selection”.

⁷⁴ See Table 3

⁷⁵ See Table 5

⁷⁶ See Table 7

This means that graduates overall experienced many online tests and this was the main initial filtering process after CVs and application forms. Almost all those on graduate schemes had to pass such tests, but for the majority online tests were unlikely to play a role in actually securing work. Nonetheless they were a dominant feature of the job-hunting experience.

Description

The tests were generally emailed to candidates after they had completed an online application and made it through the first gateway, though some were issued at the time of application and therefore appear to be part of that initial sift. There would generally be several tests covering any of the following (all examples are authentic):

- Numeracy – eg questions on finance or statistical data
- Literacy – eg questions relating pairs of words or passages with multiple choice comprehension questions
- Sequence predictions – eg which is the next shape or number in a series
- Personality tests – eg Myers Briggs
- Situational – candidates presented with a hypothetical scenario with questions on how they would respond eg if someone slipped in a supermarket, or if there was a terrorist attack in the street
- Gaming – eg games on killing “Martians” or putting items into a box
- There were also some less typical tests, especially in relation to technological skills - eg a Python programming online test,⁷⁷ a pair programming exercise,⁷⁸ UX test,⁷⁹ Excel test,⁸⁰ typing test,⁸¹ and proof reading test.⁸²

The time periods given to answer these varied greatly but the common pattern was to allow 7–10 days to complete them. Once started the tests themselves were normally timed, typically 15–45 minutes. Candidates sometimes had to do them in a specific order, with each test acting as a gateway to the next test. There was also great variation on feedback. Sometimes applicants would be given a score or a percentile and told whether they had “passed” or not⁸³, and in other situations there was no response at all (presumably indicating failure though not actually communicated).

This experience of sets of online tests was described as the standard process for graduate schemes by a number of the Participants.ⁱ

Viewpoint of Participants

Overall the Participants had a somewhat negative view of these tests.

⁷⁷ A test to show you can use the python programming language to programme.

⁷⁸ Two people work together to create some coding.

⁷⁹ User experience test (UX) being a test of looking at a website or app and feedback back on the user experience. You should be able to spot issues.

⁸⁰ A test to show you can use excel eg being able to create pivot tables.

⁸¹ A typing speed and accuracy test.

⁸² A test to check the ability to accurately proof reading a document.

⁸³ According to Brown (2004), this is more about required “hurdle rates” for sifting than actually passing by achieving a required “standard”.

This Participant explained how he struggled with making it through this early gateway:

Pz.01#10 I think all through my life I've never liked those online tests, I did struggle with them...and I can remember calling my mum and saying, oh how am I ever going to get a job because for all the knowledge and my first class degree and my paper that's done this, that and the other,⁸⁴ I can just never get past these flippin' tests! Hateful things.

And this one felt they were irrelevant as a true test of skills:

Pz.05#10 I think it's asking for skills that aren't really relevant... to the workplace... never have I had to draw on some of those numerical skills that I had in those tests I just don't think it's a representation of that person's ability to do the job...

A common frustration was the time consuming nature of the application process, including tests, and some struggled with keeping track of their applications:

Pz.21#12 At the time I was applying there were loads and loads and loads at a time and you don't have much time to wait and when you do wait and you've got loads on, you miss the deadline day because you don't know what's coming in the week and you end up getting busy and you realise oh I missed [it]...all that effort. ⁱⁱ

Others were more philosophical about the use of tests and see them as a filter for the large number of applications.ⁱⁱⁱ

The only positive comments related to the two Participants who experienced online games, and found it enjoyable albeit perplexing:

Pz.17#1 (Cz.42#) I was in my room on my iPhone playing this game! ... you played as a little Martian character thing and you had to go through these I think was about ten levels... I never [understood] what they were measuring or if it was useful by any means but it certainly made me talk about it and told my friends...^{iv}

Finally, many Participants spoke of the negative experience of modern day job-hunting where they felt they were treated as a number and sifted by an algorithm in a semi-automated way. The concept of graduate job-hunting as a dehumanising experience was a common theme and is discussed in detail in Chapter 13. This feeling was exacerbated by the fact that for an increasing number of applications the first “interview” was also automated, and rather than speaking to a person applicants were once again interacting with an algorithm.⁸⁵

What employers are looking for

In the surveys of employer needs discussed in the literature review, the ability to pass such tests per se is never mentioned. So why are they being used? Presumably it is either because employers think such tests are somehow assessing the skills they require (ie creating relevant signals), or that they are a pragmatic filter necessitated by the excessive numbers of applications. Both these explanations were given by Participants for why employers use online tests.

⁸⁴ This Participant had his final dissertation accepted for publication in an academic journal and for presentation at an international conference.

⁸⁵ See Chapter 8 and the section “Asymmetric video exercises”.

Some identified certain skills they believed were assessed by the online tests:

Pz.03#1 (Cz.26#) it was more about kind of your decision making ability and morality and ethics, that type of test and what would you do in this scenario.^v

One saw them as testing innate intelligence:

Pz.07##15 I never really understood why companies did that. We had a talk here once about it and made me think very differently about them... and they said that it's basically lots of people go to private school and lots of people pay for education and lots of people have very good opportunities given to them, whereas you need to have that natural ability and with the shape tests and things like that... you can't learn that kind of thing, it's about how your brain works, so it's kind of a way of sifting out who's had a good education for the sake of a good education and who actually is genuinely smart and it kind of weans out the people in between. So that's the way I think of it and I think that's quite nice because if you're clever but you haven't had the best education but still you are genuinely smart you can get through those levels.

Though others disagreed:

Pz.05#19 I didn't think it was a very good process at all really. I think, people can practise those tests, they can do a lot of those and get really good at them, just to pass them...^{vi}

In other words, people could learn to “play the game” and work out how to send the “right” signals so that they survive the first few “knock out”⁸⁶ rounds.

Some attempted to identify skills being tested but remained largely perplexed:

Pz.17#2 it was like a problem solving game with this Martian so maybe it's the sort of ways to approach certain issues and problems... So it would be...for instance it would be you pull up in this maze... and it would just be sort of... loads of different routes, like any other maze, and it just shows a way that we're thinking of going round or on the flipside there was another one...you have X amount of rockets or whatever and you have to choose what to fire them at and there'd be a points based system...so it was bizarre, I really didn't know what it did^{vii}

Others primarily saw the tests as a way to reduce applications:

Pz.07##1 It's also just a way of sifting out the masses and getting it down to a number which is sensible enough to look through.^{viii}

Analysis

The nature of the tests themselves also indicates why they are used by employers. Based on the descriptions given by the Participants, they often test numeracy and literacy.⁸⁷ Some, such as sequence tests, seem to be aimed at testing intelligence. Others were assessing personality types, competencies and professional judgment.

Whether such tests are a valid way of testing for these skills and characteristics is an interesting question as is whether they are fair, appropriate or effective (Dickson and Kelly, 1985; Keenan, 1995; Brown, Hesketh and Williams, 2004).

⁸⁶ Deliberately using game language.

⁸⁷ Though it is curious that this is needed given they all have a degree and according to the level descriptors and benchmark statements literacy and numeracy should be included in a degree.

Such an analysis is well beyond the scope of this thesis, but what this thesis does show is that given the increasing importance of these tests in creating a non-negotiable gateway to many (seemingly most) graduate schemes this is an area that needs further research.

One could even argue that effectively these tests are altering what it means to be a successful graduate and that the notion of graduate-ness should be redefined to include “*the ability to pass typical online tests*”. As one candidate said:

Pz.05#1 it seemed to be if it was called a graduate scheme you would have to do those tests.

This raises the question of whether the university has a responsibility to prepare students for such tests. Should they become part of the curriculum and influence assessment methodology? And what are the ethical consequences of such a change?

Finally, the use of online tests has repercussions for our understanding of signalling theory in contemporary practice. I argue that online tests effectively create “digital signals”. Crucially, some of these digital signals are even assessed digitally, that is using algorithms in an automated way. I argue that this is a seminal change to the notion of signalling.

This digital dimension is very different to the nature of signalling in graduate recruitment as put forward by Spence in 1973. The internet did not exist, and traditional selection methods would have been used, with candidates submitting their achievements and background in the form of CVs and then expanding on these during interviews (Keenan, 1995; Velasco, 2012). In all likelihood another layer of signals was subtly brought into play, relating to how people dressed, spoke, behaved, their interests and connections, all of which could play a role in selection (whether consciously or not), and often under the guise of “fitting in” (Bourdieu and Passeron, 2000; Brown, Hesketh and Williams, 2004; Rivera, 2015). I argue that we are now seeing the evolution of an entirely new layer of signals - digital signalling. This concept is explored further in Chapter 11.

Presentations and written exercises

The next most common activity was the use of presentations, both verbal and written. I have pooled written exercises and presentations as they were often combined. I have defined presentation as any verbal presentation, whether as an individual or a group or any form of written exercise. It does not include interviews or CVs, which are discussed in Chapter 9, though interviews may have a presentation embedded in them.

The majority of the Participants experienced an oral presentation (66%), with an average of two each and a range of 0-13. 51% experienced a written exercise with an average of one and a range of 0-9.⁸⁸

⁸⁸ See Table 3 and Table 5.

However, once again in terms of applications that led to job offers, the statistics are very different. Only 35% of job offers required an oral presentation, and only 20% a written exercise, with a big difference between graduate schemes and general jobs. 100% of the former required an oral presentation cf only 24% of general jobs. Written exercises were much lower, used in just over a third of graduate schemes (38%) and just under a fifth of general jobs (17%).⁸⁹

This makes the use of presentations the most important non-traditional activity for actually securing work in general jobs and much more important than tests. Participants may have experienced six applications that featured tests, and only two for presentations, but the latter was much more likely to get them a job. For graduate schemes Participants almost always had to do both.

Description

So what do presentations typically look like?

- Oral presentations varied in length from 3–20 minutes long. Many were very short so there was a need to be concise and get across one's ability within a few minutes.
- Oral presentations often required an accompanying written exercise such as the production of PowerPoint slides, but there were many examples of oral presentations without a written exercise and vice versa.
- Written exercises were most often PowerPoint slides but also reports, strategies, product proposals, and emails and letters responding to clients, and were generally very short.
- For oral presentations about half were given the topic in advance (typically one week but it could be one day) and half had to prepare on the day they attended the employer (either for an interview or an assessment day) whereas for written exercises about three-quarters were given the topic in advance.
- It was not uncommon for applicants to be given some information or data to incorporate into their presentation^{ix} and sometimes this was only given on the day and therefore required rapid analysis.⁹⁰
- Sometimes there was an unexpected element to the presentation eg change of topic on the assessment day^x, applicants not being made aware that they would be required to give a presentation,^{xi} or where applicants prepared for a presentation but then did not give one.^{xii}
- In graduate schemes the preparation for the presentation itself was often part of the group exercise that would itself be observed. Candidates would then present back to the observers, creating a highly artificial dynamic.^{xiii}
- Presentations were often given to two people, but sometimes many more including other applicants eg all the observers on an assessment day plus groups of candidates. This could mean an audience of up to 20.^{xiv}
- The number of presentations needed for one employer ranged from 1–3.^{xv}

⁸⁹ See Table 5, Table 6 and Table 7

⁹⁰ See "data analysis tasks" in Chapter 8.

- For oral presentations about three-quarters were individual presentations and a quarter group presentations. All group presentations were on graduate schemes at the assessment day. All written presentations were individual.
- Presentations were often followed by questions, and these could be quite demanding.^{xvi}
- The topics were wide ranging, but generally relatively realistic meaning highly relevant to the company. Occasionally applicants could choose their own, in which case they had to think about what kind of impression they would make in the choice of topic itself.^{xvii} However in 80% of cases the topic was set by the employer.

Viewpoint of Participants

In contrast to the online tests, the Participants generally found presentations a positive experience:

Pz.01#1 (Cz.49#) I definitely like the presentations – this is probably just personal preference.

Pz.07##2 (Cz.43#) I quite liked that [getting the topic in advance] because some graduate schemes make you write the presentation there and then whereas this was actually thought out – they're looking at ideas as well as how you present.

Pz.13#1 (Cz.31#) I actually think that my presentation was – without sounding boastful – but I think it was the best, because I did work a lot on in with Frances and Will and came into Pinetree and practised it, so I mean they were giving me tips. I mean each time I did it, it was a different presentation. So it was basically like I was acting to a script, so that's why I thought the presentation was actually pretty good compared to everyone else's.^{xviii}

Even when they also felt pressured:

Pz.20#1 (Cz.21#) So that was quite nerve wracking ... there was a lot of data to go through, even though the questions were quite targeted, so it was a case of working through the data and working out where I was going to be getting the answers from and then preparing the answers on PowerPoint... it was a real set of client questions that they've had like years ago and that was actually really, really interesting and I enjoyed the task^{xix}

This Participant explained how he preferred it to be more challenging:

Pz.09#1 (Cz.07# cf Cz.15#) I felt good about it, you know the fact that it was quite tough made me want the job more. If I compare it to the Cz.15# interview process, the fact that I felt that there were skills that were left out, it almost felt too easy... it was almost the thrill of the fight.

What employers are looking for

The ability to communicate well both orally and in writing is one of the main skill sets mentioned by employers in numerous studies (Finch *et al.*, 2013; Brooks and Calkins, 2016; CBI, 2017). Therefore, the use of presentations as a selection technique is not surprising and makes intuitive sense. Possibly what is surprising is that over 75% of general jobs did not require any form of oral presentation, and over 80% did not require any form of written presentation.

Presentations were used for much more than assessing communication skills. According to the Participants they also demonstrated team-working skills, confidence, the ability to be concise, to analyse data, and to perform under pressure, and they could even give an insight into the applicant's character.^{xx}

Though one Participant took a more cynical view:

Pz.21#1 (Cz.44#) these guys are getting just a little insight there of it, a little task out of it for free, they're getting a value added plan that's going to make us millions, right, so they put this situation up to so make a package for us and see how you do but they're actually looking for a package, so now they've collated all this information, be like "guys look at this, definitely we can make money out of this"... these guys yeah send 'em off... that's how I think it goes, right, and I used to think corporates aren't like that you know, oh they care about equal opportunities and...that's not how it works.

Analysis

Presentations are already often used within degree courses and are therefore straightforward to include in the curriculum (unlike the typical online tests which are a very different assessment methodology to that commonly used in universities).

However it may be worth considering the details given above and incorporating aspects into the university pedagogy, in particular: the nature of the presentations, the length and the preparation time allowed as actually experienced by the Participants, the unexpected nature of some of the tasks, the frequent lack of feedback, and the ability to synthesise large amounts of data quickly for some applications.

One issue is that oral presentations can be unpopular with students, even if they turn out to be crucial for graduates:

Pz.02#1 I mean, I was rubbish at public speaking when I first came into Pinetree, I hated it, hated doing presentations, now I can so it really helped.

Pz.08#1 For me... one of the main things I think that I developed was just in the interviews being less nervous, being able to talk to people... we had to do a lot of exercises like that and doing a lot of presentations and a lot of the elevator pitches I think that helped me tremendously because I used to hate talking in public.

This can potentially create a tension between the student as consumer with a "right" to be "satisfied" and the learning experience needed to make a successful transition to work. This tension will be explored further in Chapter 14 under for "policy and professional practice implications".

Teamwork

One of the major skills required by employers is the ability to work collaboratively. One only needs a very short time in virtually any company to appreciate how crucial this is in the modern work environment (Brown, Hesketh and Williams, 2004; Archer and Davison, 2008; CBI, 2018).⁹¹

The findings on the use of teamwork are therefore perhaps surprising. On average, the Participants experienced only one teamwork exercise in their entire job-hunting experience (range 0-11), with 57% not experiencing any teamwork exercise at all. This was the only specified activity experienced by a minority of the Participants.

The results are even more notable when looking at what was required for successful job applications. Only 17% of job offers required a teamwork exercise – and all but one were for graduate schemes. In other words teamwork exercises were virtually unused in the selection process for general jobs, but used in 100% of the graduate schemes. Given that about 95% of graduates do not appear to go on to a graduate scheme (Brown, Hesketh and Williams, 2004; High Fliers Research, 2019b) this is interesting and suggests that effort put in to teamwork during the degree may not be repaid with job offers.

Description

The teamwork exercises were almost exclusively held as part of a graduate scheme assessment day, and were part of a series of activities for that day. Typically applicants were put in groups of 4–10, the exercise would take 15–45 minutes, and would often culminate in a team presentation. They were all observed by a panel of 2–8 people (employees of the company, sometimes outnumbering the group being observed), who would sit around the perimeter of the room throughout, taking notes while the applicants “performed” before them.

The exercises fell in two types. The first type were generic activities such as who/what would you rescue from a desert island⁹², constructing things with beanbags or other items, and planning a rescue mission:

Pz.07##7 (Cz.43#) then it had a group assessment which was based around, like, you're lost on a desert island, these are your items, how do you prioritise the items, and then there's a panel who are watching you do it, so it's always a bit nice and awkward.

Pz.13#2 (Cz.31#) the first exercise was we had to draw three different things so it was like Pictionary and the other group had to guess what it was. I guess it was just a way to see our character as we were joking about it and stuff, it was very casual.^{xxi}

The second type were more realistic such as deciding on investments for the company, developing an HR process, and creating a marketing campaign:

Pz.02#2 (Cz.62#) you would present your ideas to everyone in the group and you would essentially be fighting for where the money should be invested.

⁹¹ See Brown's (2004) discussion of the collaborative nature of knowledge based work.

⁹² This was actually the most common teamwork exercise.

Pz.07##3 (Cz.60#) it was about people being made redundant and one of the stores was going to close and you had to basically build a process to make the people redundant, say what your priorities are and how you are actually going to deliver the message, what would happen if somebody disputed it, deal with that process.

Viewpoint of Participants

Generally Participants were positive but wary about the group work exercises.

Some felt the group exercises were a good way of assessing people:

Pz.05#2 (Cz.53#) I actually do think group exercises are a very good way of assessing people... it depends what kind of person you are but I think it can put people at ease, being able to communicate with people that are in the same situation with you, and I do think it is very telling... of what that person is like and what kind of employee they would be as well because you're working in teams... in any situation really in a job, so I think it can show things that people don't necessarily think that they're showing^{xxii}

Even one who was painfully shy:

Pz.13#3 (Cz.50#) as someone that's a bit introverted it does take a few moments to feel comfortable... but I do feel that working in groups is a great way in actually bringing about their confidence, seeing how they interact with everyone. I did enjoy that, I enjoyed speaking with everyone.

But others simply found them irritating, especially the generic activities:

Pz.01#18 I just get really fed up... I understand why you have to talk about how you'd get people off an island but we're not really there to discuss that.

Pz.21#10 literally it blew my mind in how silly it was, right, like very basic getting to know people, kind of what you do in a classroom on the first day of school, right, things like that.

All the group exercises described by the Participants were observed, making this a highly artificial construct. The exercises were always with other applicants (never employees) who were also competitors, and the observers were present throughout and often openly taking notes, inevitably making applicants self-conscious:

Pz.21#2 (Cz.44#) so there's eight of us and there's twelve of them, yeah four here, four there, and four there [pointing around the room]... honestly it was like we don't know who's looking at who.

He went on to explain how he found it impossible to simply ignore the observers as advised:

Pz.21#3 especially because I had two on my right shoulder, two on my left shoulder here when I was speaking to people so it was like you know you can feel them burning behind you.^{xxiii}

The Participants were acutely aware of the need to behave in the "right" way:

Pz.05#7 (Cz.53#) I am always so conscious of what they're thinking, the p- the people that are assessing what they're thinking of each person and what they're looking for. And it's hard to know whether they want someone that's gonna take the lead, someone that's gonna sit and kind of organise everyone...

Pz.01#7 you do find yourself in the group work, you're having to suddenly be really careful because you can't be seen as that dominating force and you can't be seen as that... maybe as loud as you were in the interview...

Pz.02#7 you are all part of the same team so they just wanted to see your approach to it. Mine was listening to what everyone wanted to say and then counteracting all the arguments rather than just pushing mine, which is what a lot of them did.

RTS# A lot of them did the same as you?

Pz.02# No, they just pushed their idea and didn't really listen to anyone else

RTS# So why did you do that?

Pz.02# Because that's what they wanted

RTS# That's what you thought Cz.62# would want?

Pz.02# Yes.

In fact this Participant went to considerable trouble to ensure that he knew exactly what this particular employer was looking for and performed accordingly.^{xxiv}

As a result of needing to behave “correctly” this Participant expressed doubt as to whether employers would see the real person in → group exercises:

Pz.01#2 Am I going to honestly sit there and really aggressively fight with a bunch of graduate adults about who should be coming off an island? For me I just kind of, I just thought oh this somewhat patronising, I get really irritable with those kinds of assessments, give me something real and then you'll get the real me.

Apart from the artificiality of being observed, another concern was how other members of the group impacted on the ability to perform, as this Participant explains:

Pz.03#7 you're often forced into one group and, as I say, it may not be conducive to letting you show your ability... it tends to be that you have one or two individuals that just don't let others speak and are constantly talking over people [which] means that you're effectively penalising other people because you just don't see them speak.

This is nicely illustrated by two contrasting experiences with the same Participant:

Pz.07##8 (Cz.43#) My group were really nice, which made a difference because sometimes you go to these things and you've got one very outspoken person and it means that you can't really get on with it whereas this group could work together really easily, so yeah, it was fine, that was the easiest part.

Pz.07##9 (Cz.60#) We did that in a group of people and that was just awful, it just didn't click. We didn't get along and it [was] almost like a bit argumentative.

She was offered the job in the first instance, and was rejected in the second instance.

What employers are looking for

Employers are obviously looking at how well applicants can work collaboratively in these exercises, and as some candidates noted not at whether you could “win” a debate^{xxv}. However, as with presentations, Participants identified many other things they believed were being assessed apart from teamwork:

Pz.18#1 (Cz.20#) I think first of all analytical skills, how quickly you could really quick up or read what information we had then realise so-and-so doesn't have the same information as me, what do you have, right let's map this out, so probably our ability to observe and analyse what information we had... how we communicate as a team, maybe did we take the lead, what role did we assume within the team, I think probably was there a timekeeper, did someone bother to take the time or be the nominated writer or leader. I think how much as an individual I participated in the challenge and maybe how useful was that information to the team.

Pz.19#1 (Cz.37#) I really, really liked it. Purely because it's also what happens when you work within a team. So it was very grounded in the sense that ok this is what happens when you're part of an HR team or any team that you work with. You may have an idea that you think is absolutely brilliant but somebody else might think, "oh it's absolute rubbish" and you know, it's against this policy or we can't do it for that specific reason. And working with people who you don't know was also very nice because at the same time, one of them, I remember... I was-like, prodding him to answer questions because he was so nervous. The other person was confident. And just like having to get them to open up and although they were very knowledgeable, but they lacked the confidence in terms of communicating with somebody else. So it was also very interesting to see how other people react to the situation.

Pz.01#3 I would assume the first group test we did was, you know how do we engage with one another, convey our points, you know communicate with concision but at the same time have enough depth behind your argument as to why you think somebody should be moved on this island and probably to a degree how hard are you at putting it across, are you too nasty or are you too nice...

This balance of "nasty and nice", the goldilocks game⁹³, was well understood by many of the Participants.^{xxvi} ⁹⁴ Employers are often looking for someone who is inclusive, who listens to others, and does not try to dominate as this Participant explains:

Pz.07##4 (Cz.60#) I remember I got feedback on that and they were like, "you [were] good and that was fine", and they were actually "we preferred the position that you played in it, like you didn't take charge of it, which was a good thing" and they were, "we actually look for people who don't lead the way, we look for people who sit back and give good information and also try and include everyone" ^{xxvii}

Analysis

It is clear that successfully navigating a group exercise is a key requirement for most graduate schemes. And even though it is not as relevant for securing general jobs, common sense says it is very relevant for performing in almost any modern work environment. One could conclude that teamwork should be included in the classroom experience.

However, group work, just as with oral presentations, can be unpopular with students during degree studies as not everyone is seen as properly pulling their weight, and therefore students can feel it is unfair to be judged as a group.^{xxviii} Yet to secure a role on a graduate scheme the ability to perform in a group, even a difficult one, is of critical importance.

⁹³ Deliberately using game language.

⁹⁴ See further the "Adjusting personality" section in Chapter 10.

This Participant gives an insightful explanation of how problematic group work during studies can be seen as a very helpful learning experience:

Pz.07##5 I think almost things that went wrong were quite good, so when you're working in a group that you don't like the people in, someone's not pulling their weight, that is a really good life lesson and it's so much better than things going perfectly and you getting an amazing grade because it actually teaches you how to behave.... You can't choose your team when you come to work... I see it as an opportunity to make people get on your side. If someone is very unmotivated, don't see that as a problem, you can change the way they're feeling and that's such an achievement for yourself anyway and if you really need an excuse for why it's going to be beneficial to you, you can then go and use it in your interviews because you've actually turned a situation around. So, yeah, you'll never get a perfect team and it's your responsibility to make every team you work in work for you.

Even so, a curriculum and assessment strategy that includes such activities may well increase the tension between the student as consumer and student as potential employee.

Additionally, the group exercises as described by the Participants are artificial constructs, and candidates are inevitably highly conscious of their behaviour. This raises an interesting question. Should universities focus on helping students develop collaborative skills and experiences, or should they actually be teaching them how to “perform” a group exercise on an assessment day and make the “right impression”? I suggest that these are two very different things. This is explored further in Chapter 10 on indirect signalling.

Conclusion

This chapter shares the key findings on the specified selection activities. Participants were expressly asked about tests, presentations, written exercises and teamwork exercises during the phone survey. The descriptions they provided are themselves of interest, and indicate a significant difference between the traditional classroom experience and the selection methods used to decide on graduate job offers. A common theme across all these activities is the tension between what students may regard as an appropriate learning experience, in their role as consumers of higher education, and what they need to prepare them for the reality of the post-graduation job-hunting, in their role as potential employees. This is discussed further in Chapter 14. A second key theme is the emerging digital dimension of the university-work transition. This is discussed further in Chapter 11.

The Participants were then asked if there were “any other activities” they experienced. The next chapter presents those findings.

Chapter 8 - Other Selection Activities

Introduction

During the phone survey, after asking the Participants about whether they had experienced the specified activities discussed in Chapter 7, they were then asked about “any other selection activities” they underwent. This chapter presents the findings on these other activities.

Overall, 83% of Participants said they had experienced another type of activity in their job-hunting experience.⁹⁵ In terms of successful applications, 54% experienced such an activity,⁹⁶ making it by far the biggest category of non-traditional activities. As this is actually a collection of different activities this is another indication that the journey to employment was highly individual and varied.

The three main categories of “other activity” were:⁹⁷

- Asymmetric video interviews
- Analysis tasks and role-plays
- Internships and similar

For each I provide a description, the viewpoint of the Participants and an indication of what Participants thought employers were looking for.

Note that this was an open question and therefore the statistics are for those that mentioned these various other activities. There may have been more that were not discussed at the time of the interview.

Asymmetric video exercise

Description

The most common type of other activity mentioned was the “asymmetric video exercise”. 19/47 Participants discussed these, but as this was an open question there may well have been more had everyone been asked about asymmetric video exercises specifically.

What are asymmetric video exercises? Based on descriptions provided by candidates, these are where questions are asked and answers recorded using video technology, where there is no live interaction between the applicant and the employer⁹⁸. This is in

⁹⁵ See Table 5

⁹⁶ See Table 6

⁹⁷ There were a number of other exercises not covered here, and are summarised in Table 9 and Table 10

⁹⁸ The use of these has increased substantially from 4% in 2012 to 42% in 2016 (AGR, 2016)

contrast to phone, Skype and face-to-face interviews which involve live interaction and are discussed under interviews in Chapter 9.

The typical features of asymmetric video exercises as reported by the Participants are:⁹⁹

- They were part of the early sifting process, and in graduate schemes often one of the early gateways as with the online tests.
- Generally questions were not provided in advance, but given on the spot, though there were occasional exceptions.
- Once the “interview” started, questions would be auto-generated, either with a talking head or in writing on the screen.^{xxix}
- There were strict time limits imposed, a few moments (5–20 seconds) to think of a response and then a limited time in which to answer each question (from 10 seconds^{xxx} to 3 minutes^{xxxi}), sometimes varying by question,^{xxxii} with a visible timer of some sort counting down. The recording camera clicks on when the time for answering commences, and answers are automatically recorded and sent to the employer. In two examples answers were recorded by Participants and then emailed to the employer allowing the applicant the opportunity to take their time and re-record as necessary^{xxxiii} but in most instances it was automatic with no opportunity to re-record.
- They typically took from 10–30 minutes to complete.

Asymmetric video exercises were universally disliked and described as daunting, horrible, horrific, freaky, off-putting, awful, odd, bizarre, terrible, horrendous, and nerve wracking.¹⁰⁰

Here the process is described in the Participants’ own words:

Pz.05#3 (Cz.30#)... they wouldn’t tell you what the questions were beforehand, they would just pop up, and then you would have 30 seconds to answer the question and then go onto the next question... there was a countdown, a 30 second countdown and all you can see is your face so it’s quite off-putting

Pz.07##6 (Cz.17#) And then you had to do a video interview.....which was awful. So you get two types of video interviews: you get one where you can prepare for, you know the questions they’re going to ask you, and then you get this one which is they can literally ask you anything so it’s like a little guy on the screen and he’s like ‘hello’, it’s like an actual video of somebody pre-recorded and then you get like ten seconds you have to answer... if you can’t think of answer there’s no way you’re going to have time to think of it again...

⁹⁹ See Table 8

¹⁰⁰ Compare this to the AGR survey in which some employers saw video interviews as a way of improving student experience (AGR, 2016).

Viewpoint of the Participants

Without exception the Participants found the experience a negative one, partly due to the artificially constructed time pressure:

Pz.05#4 (Cz.30#) it was very difficult, very awkward, I didn't like it at all. Because I think... you do need time to process a question before you answer it so that just gave you no time at all to think about what the question was you just have to speak... so I came away thinking that was awful.

But mainly because of the lack of human contact, which meant an inherent inability to read and respond to signals:

Pz.08#2 (Cz.04#) once you start obviously it's recording you so if you said something on the previous question it's put you in a fluster [laughs] and when the next question comes in and you see the thirty seconds then it flusters you even more... The whole thing is really off putting...It's freaky! I like to talk to people and sort of gauge how they react to my answers and then I know which way to sort of take action in the interview but with this you have no idea, you just don't know what they want or what they're looking for. ^{xxxiv}

Pz.02#3 (Cz.52#) I did not like it!

RTS# why not?

Pz.02# I couldn't build a rapport with the machine!

RTS# so how did you handle it?

Pz.02# I just tried to do it the exact same way that I would do any other interview ... I answered it in a very, I guess, laid back kind of way...I just sat there and did it as I would be speaking to anyone and essentially I had my fiancée sitting on the other side of the computer, so I was just talking to her.

What employers are looking for

Although universally disliked, the Participants were able to explain why employers used asymmetric video exercises as a selection technique. Some saw the main purpose as being a mechanism to sift large numbers:

Pz.05#5 (Cz.30#) I guess with something like that you have to have a lot of stages... because of the volume of applications you get... you can't meet everyone. But unfortunately that means that people do get quite brutal 'no's' throughout the process.

Pz.15#1 (Cz.55#) I think it was for their benefit rather than the graduate just to keep that interview period short and concise so that they had time to sift through them all... I think that they probably had so many applications they couldn't physically see everyone.

But they could also find skills-based reasons for using this technique including thinking on your feet, handling a deliberately difficult situation, showing your personality, being able to both take on information rapidly and keep your answers relevant.^{xxxv} One even suggested it could be an attempt to be more objective and fair by limiting the time and removing the opportunity to create human connections:

Pz.01#4 (Cz.49#)... because it's time bound maybe it makes it more fair... you can't milk through being charming or interesting, [with] an extra bit of time to try and impress.

Analysis

Over the past ten years the use of asymmetric video exercises has become an increasingly common part of the graduate scheme selection process (AGR, 2016). In this sample, at least 19 experienced them. However, there is only evidence of three leading successfully to offers (one graduate scheme role, one general job role, one Master's degree place^{xxxvi}). In other words, 40% experienced these "interviews", but of those over 90% were ultimately unsuccessful.

Although Participants are able to see reasons for their use, it is clearly a highly artificial construct. Along with the online tests discussed in Chapter 7 and the use of key words discussed in Chapter 11 it raises interesting questions on the use of technology and algorithms in the selection of candidates for employment, as well as on the role of the university in preparing students for such experiences which seem to have become the new gateway to elite graduate scheme jobs.

Data analysis tasks and role-plays

Description

The next most common activity was analysis exercises. 16 examples were described where candidates had to absorb large amounts of data prior to undertaking the activity, and generally with very little notice of what was required.

Twelve experiences of role-plays were described by the graduates, being activities where candidates had to act out scenarios. Role-play activities were typically based on HR scenarios, operational problems, or pitching services. They were all realistic and relevant to the role.¹⁰¹

These were not team exercises, and in each case the applicant was the only applicant present. However the applicants did interact with employees of the company during the activity. This is quite different to the teamwork exercises discussed in Chapter 7 which were always with competing candidates and never with real employees.

These activities were generally explained on the day with no opportunity to prepare beforehand. One Participant did not even realise it was a role-play at the time, and only found out later.^{xxxvii} However in 3/12 role-plays and 5/16 analysis exercises applicants were able to prepare beforehand.

In four examples role-plays and analysis exercises were combined with large amounts of data provided on the day to candidates who had to absorb it rapidly and then incorporate it into the role-play. Furthermore, applicants were often (five examples) given feedback and/or additional information during the role-play and would have to incorporate that into the activity. The ability to absorb and analyse data rapidly is therefore a common feature of these exercises.

¹⁰¹ Remember that some activities fall into more than one category. See Table 9 and Table 10

The exercises are so varied it is best to look in detail at some examples to gain some insight into what they were like for the Participants.

This Participant had to role-play a disciplinary process for an employee:

Pz.07##10 (Cz.60#¹⁰²) So we had to do a role-play, we go into a room and they gave you (no joke) twenty different sheets, different values and then different scenarios about a person but it was so much information to take in and not long enough to take it in. You could write things down but what is like the next stage of it? You don't know what it's for.

RTS# So they sat you down on separate tables, hand you this wad of paper... did they tell you anything about what you had to do? It was just 'read this'?

Pz.07## 'Read this'. So you're trying to read it and understand it and try to just make some sense of it and then they take you into the room for the role-play and – it's quite funny – one of their employees just kind of slumps in a chair, like they must be like thirty or forty, but they're acting like a teenager so you walk in and there's this moody teenager and you basically needed to have memorised all their values and understand exactly what they want from their like a disciplinary process, so it's all in this information, disciplinary process, values, case study on this person, you need to take it all in. So you go into this room and they tell you [that] you need to discipline this colleague.

This Participant had to construct customer packages for the employer:

Pz.21#4 (Cz.44#¹⁰³) in the afternoon it was a lot more specific to do with the banking sector, right. You're given like a brief, something to do with debit card it was...[and] they were saying, 'right you've got this kind of customer', a student I think, you had a business customer and then you had like another international customer or something and then you had four or five products, 'allocate a product to each with a recommendation of why that person fits with that product and then create a new product for each and then a one size fits all product that you can do using only four options'... so you're building packages essentially

This one is an example of having to pitch services:

Pz.17#7 (Cz.12#¹⁰⁴) He sat me down, introduced himself and we just had a very basic ten minute conversation and then he kind of stopped me and said 'I'll be right back sorry', and I was like 'okay', and he came back with a like a specification, so a job spec for one of the roles that they were doing at senior level so it was a director of business development... right. So he said, 'I just want you to quickly read this over and I'll give you five minutes to read this seventy-six page document' and he's like 'I'm going to be coming back in and I just want you to pitch me the role, your services and so on'.

This Participant had to act as if advising a client on a case study. In this instance he was not given anything to read, but the information was shared verbally in chunks over the course of the exercise, a particularly demanding example of having to think on one's feet:

Pz.09#7 (Cz.07#¹⁰⁵) I was given the case study in the interview, that was more of a business style case study, it was a typical management consultancy case study although it was a little bit technical... He again was kind of putting me under pressure but in a perfectly reasonable

¹⁰² This was a role play and analysis exercise.

¹⁰³ This was a data analysis exercise and a written exercise.

¹⁰⁴ This was a presentation, an analysis exercise, and a role play.

¹⁰⁵ This was a role play and an analysis exercise.

way and I liked the guy. I think I struggled with that one slightly... because I'd only just been given the material so... it was managing... staffing for a retail shop, how do you manage who's on which till effectively and how do you get the right customers to go to the right tills

RTS# Did he give you any documents?

Pz.09# No he totally just explained the case study

RTS# And then expected you to respond immediately?

Pz.09# Yeah... really challenging, really really challenging. So he sort of gave an overview of the problem and then he said, 'what do you think, how would you go about solving this', and then you basically start talking and at some point he interrupts you and says, 'okay on that why do you think that'... and then he'll give you a little bit more information... 'so we've got you know twenty customers heading to that one store but then actually you've got another store thirty miles down the road, how does that change the situation, is there something you could do?' And you could say, 'okay well have we got vans going between... you know what's the cost per mile'... that sort of stuff, and you start to talk about metrics and he says, 'okay why that metric'... you have to know your stuff on something that you don't know anything about! [Laughs] So yeah, really, really tough. ^{xxxviii}

In most cases these were “pretend” role-plays, with interviewers and interviewees acting allocated roles and the applicant demonstrating their skill. However it is very interesting to note that in some cases graduates actually engaged with real clients as the next two examples describe.

This Participant had to call potential candidates for a recruitment company and get some sign-ons, as well as taking on feedback throughout the exercise from managers and adapting his approach:

Pz.02#8 (Cz.08#) He brought me in to the office [for] a test day where they put you on the phones, they'll bring up a list of the people that have applied through Monster or wherever, get you to call them. They give you a set paper of all the information that you need to get from this person and, I mean, pretty much if you don't get anything then you haven't got the role; if you missed out one or two or three then, you know, one of the managers would come up to you and say 'okay this is what you're doing, this is what you need to do a bit better, try again'. If you're getting the same result every time then you've probably not got the role but if you're at least showing that you are listening to what they're saying, learning and using the advice that they're giving you on the next call, then you've got the role.

RTS# So, these people that you were calling, were they real candidates?

Pz.02# Yes.

RTS#... Okay, I'm just trying to envisage this, so you were in a kind of mini call centre type thing, you've got a script

Pz.02# Yeah, you've got a piece of paper in front of you, you've got a phone, you've got I guess the numbers on your screen in front of you and you then you just go through

RTS# And this guy is watching you?

Pz.02# Yeah, I mean there are three main managers there, there is one managing director, two directors, and three senior managers. Any one of them would be listening from anywhere in the office and once you've finished the call they'll come up and tell you, you know, what you can do better, what went well, and then see if you apply it to the next call

This Participant had to run a mentoring session with real students. This is also one of the few that was able to prepare in advance:

Pz.20#7 (Cz.01#) I started with my mentoring session which was nice because that was the one I was most nervous about... It was under observation by one of the teachers and I was introduced to these four students... real students, real sixth form students, Year 12s, and I sat with them in... one of their study rooms as there were other students around but it was just me and these students were the focus and so I asked them about how they felt about the topic and how confident they were and then we did a couple of past questions, which is what I'd prepared, and then at the end I asked them how they felt about it now and they felt more confident so I took that as a positive.

Viewpoint of the Participants

Generally the reaction to role-plays and analysis activities was positive, even where they were ultimately rejected. This was partly because of their realism, meaning applicants could understand their purpose, and partly because they were interesting and a change from the usual process.^{xxxix}

This Participant (following on from Pz.07##10 above) ultimately chalked up her first disastrous graduate scheme application to experience and recognised her own lack of skill:

Pz.07##11 (Cz.60#)... so I went in and I was so harsh on them, like 'why are you off?' And then I remember being, 'right well, you know I've warned you before so you're fired!'... I think I said 'one more chance and then you're fired' – I think I probably used words definitely you should never say, and you had to find out that his mum was an alcoholic so that's why he was being resistant to going on the training courses because it disrupts things for the family and he had exams and all this stuff and basically you had to work out his emotional problems and why he's behaving the way he is. And then go in line with the disciplinary process for what you do next. So I just messed it up!

What employers are looking for

The Participants identified several key things being sought by employers, in addition to the ability to absorb and analyse data.

Companies could be looking for an understanding of their values and approach. This Participant explained how she was able to demonstrate this:

Pz.19#2 (Cz.33#) It was a role-play about, so if I was the manager and then somebody had come to me with a grievance, you know, what would I do in that situation?... so I had to step in [to the team leader's] shoes. So basically it was, you know, 'what would you do in this situation? How would you cope with it? What do you think would be the best approach?'... But what I did before hand, I actually read through about their company and, you know, what sort of attributes they are looking for in the person and what is it they promote as a company. And I remembered in the role-play and I had to advise that you know, as a company these are you know, the qualities that we look out for in a person. And that was very well received by the Manager, who actually made a point to say, 'We've never had somebody whose actually looked up in so much detail and actually pulled that in the role-play before... Never'

And provides a good contrast to this Participant who failed to demonstrate the requisite values in relation to the faux teenager episode:

Pz.07##21 (Cz.60#) I didn't feel I did badly until I got the feedback on it and I was like, 'oh, I didn't do that well!' I thought, 'oh actually that's gone quite well, I found out all the stuff about him,' but then in my feedback they were 'you were way too harsh, we would never do that to anyone' and they were 'in Pz.64# we always think about people'. That's kind of what they wanted to see...

The requirement to show an understanding of company values and a willingness to adopt them is discussed in detail in Chapter 9.

Participants felt that others were looking for specific skills needed for the job,^{xi} and for how candidates respond to challenging situations.^{xli}

Analysis

As can be seen from the descriptions, the role-plays and tasks varied considerably, and were generally relevant to the role and interesting for candidates to do. They show a creative approach to skills assessment, and a demanding one. It is also interesting to see that they can be very challenging and the Participant may even fail, and yet can still be a positive experience. This might provide some ideas on how to incorporate such activities into the classroom without necessarily compromising “student satisfaction”.¹⁰⁶ Given their importance in securing employment this data underlines the need to prepare graduates for the unexpected and for a rich range of arduous potential activities.

Internships and work experience

As explained in Chapter 5 internships are an important part of the student experience at Pinetree and most Participants undertook an internship, work experience or similar. However, this section is about the role of internships (or similar) in *directly* securing work. In a number of examples an internship or prior work experience with the employer was an integral part of securing their role – de facto an “other activity” in the recruitment and selection process.

16/47 of the Participants had a pre-existing relationship with their eventual employer, typically as an intern.¹⁰⁷ Note that five of these were employed by Pinetree itself and four were with start-up businesses run by lecturer-entrepreneurs at Pinetree. Therefore there is a very strong link with Pinetree itself.

¹⁰⁶ See the discussion on presentations and teamwork in Chapter 7 on the potential tension between student satisfaction and student preparation for job-hunting as well as Chapter 14.

¹⁰⁷ Two were students of the employer (Pinetree) and therefore had a pre-existing relationship although not an internship. The use of internships as a recruitment tool is shown by the report of one survey that 25% of final year undergraduates had been offered a graduate role as a result of work experience with the employer (High Fliers Research, 2016).

Description

For four Participants, the internship effectively led to an extended audition process, with them working part-time, on summer internships and on various projects over an extended period while studying:

Pz.03#8 (Cz.24#) So I obviously knew [the lecturer] from my time at Pinetree... I knew he'd set up his own business and just approached him about that and...anyway he got back to me a little bit later and said actually there was an opportunity to get involved with his work which he was just getting off the ground so... so this was towards the end of my second year. So I did some work part-time for him then and then I went on to do an internship with him in that summer... throughout my final year I did bits of work wherever I could... he made quite clear to me from my internship... that he was quite keen to offer me a job... it was slightly caveated that presuming he was able to get the company to a stage where it could support me, support its first full-time employee, then he really wanted me to come on board... and that following year when I was starting to look at other things, he did come back to me and basically say, look things are going well...^{xlii}

In these examples the only selection technique was this building of a professional relationship during degree study. There were no formal interviews or other constructed selection activities.

For others the trial process may not have been quite so extensive but nevertheless experience with the employer played a key role in being recruited as can be seen in this example:

Pz.15#2 (Pinetree) I approached [them] to ask if there were sort of any positions I was interested- I knew they were currently recruiting for a Marketing Executive. And so [they] met with me and said they've just filled that but we do have the Alumni role that I do think you would be well suited, send me your details, so I did that. And then [they] got in touch and I came in and I met with [them] and that was- that was it really... I [had already] spent four months with them in the beginning... after my first year before my second, that summer.^{xliii}

Viewpoint of the Participants

This less structured more relationship-based approach, largely based on already having worked together, was universally regarded as positive by the Participants:

Pz.06#1 (Cz.45#) It was fantastic... having that amount of experience while I was still at university, that genuine real world practical experience, basically doing the job that I wanted to do whilst I was still at university was very motivating and engaging. It obviously taught me a huge amount that you can't learn on a degree... and yeah I think if I had to then apply for other jobs then it would have made it much, much easier, given that amount of experience. I was getting paid reasonably good money while studying as well which is very nice so yeah it was really good. Hard work...^{xliv}.

Even when combined with other selection activities such as presentations and interviews:

Pz.05#6 (Pinetree) it worked well in the situation because I obviously knew the company very well, and knew the people that worked in the team quite well so I knew what the culture was like and that kind of thing. So having just one interview did work because it wasn't like I needed to find out a lot more information and I was quite keen to get into that team quite quickly as well so it really worked for me. I do often think if you are going for a job at a new

company and you just have one round of interviews... that's not often enough time to get to know what the company is like, what the culture's like, what your manager is going to be like, 'cause often it's half an hour, an hour at most, it's quite hard to get an idea I think in that situation.^{xlv}

It was even seen as the way of the future by this candidate, as a more effective and authentic selection process:

Pz.23#1 (Cz.45#) I actually think it's probably likely going to be, not that process, but there's going to be part of that process which is actually seeing the people live working and using that as an assessment, more than interviews, more than traditional interviews. I think that will probably start to have its way either into internship recruitment or normal recruitment, it's watching people in their natural environment, I don't know quite how that will work but I feel like that is a stronger way of assessing someone or a different way of assessing someone than a traditional interview.

In terms of fairness there was some consciousness that it could be seen as not completely fair, but that this could be justified. For example one Participant pointed out there are other ways to have a trial period apart from internships such as probation periods^{xlvi}; another that you still had to prove yourself in the role^{xlvii}; and another that other students could be proactive about recognising and sourcing such opportunities^{xlviii}.

Pz.23#2 (Cz.45#) it's unique... and yeah I think it's time and a place, you know I was very lucky to be in that class, in this year with him teaching, finding that interest, I think there's a lot of coincidental luck, to be honest, but there was an opportunity that clearly presented itself and there was still work needed to be done on my part to actually go and get it.^{xlix}

The most reflective comment recognised the uniqueness of the opportunity, but also saw this as an inevitable part of life and not inherently unfair:

Pz.06#8 (Cz.45#) Is it fair?... there's probably a number of different angles you can think about it from. I mean you can say was it fair relative to the cohort that [the lecturer] is kind of choosing people from which is, you know, my peers in the degree... it's those that put themselves forward and showed potential and the right sort of attributes for the company. So I think from that perspective it's fair... Is it fair compared to other graduates that didn't have that opportunity? No because they didn't have the opportunity but I guess that's life, isn't it, when opportunities are presented to you makes a huge difference to your trajectory.

What employers are looking for

When asked about why they think they got the job Participants were able to identify skills sought in the selection process, but it is also clear that the ongoing relationship with the company and the opportunity to understand its needs in-depth provided by work experience was a significant advantage:

Pz.05#11 (Pinetree) I think, showing that I had quite a lot of attention to detail, that I'd thought about kind of every angle, and that I really understood the brand as well... Because I think my experience as a student here really helps in the role that I'm in now because I do understand what it's like to be on the other side so I think that probably supported my application.

Pz.15#3 (Pinetree) I know I keep talking about relationships but essentially that is a lot of what it boils down to. And I think being personable and being able to maintain those relationships and build them with people that you don't know as well, and to do it quickly and to have that longevity to it, so, that they, you know they do stay in touch...!

Analysis

The role of internships as a selection method and how this fits in with signalling theory is explored further in Chapter 14 under the theoretical discussion. Internships are also discussed in Chapter 12 under networking. While in some ways internships could be regarded as an ideal selection method, there are obviously considerable challenges around providing such opportunities at scale. Further, there are concerns about equality of opportunity in securing internships (Jerrim, 2014; Montacute, 2018). However, the findings of this case study suggest that if there was one single thing universities could do to help graduates transition to work, it would be to ensure their students had the opportunity to undertake work experience or an internship.

Conclusion

It is interesting to compare the universally positive opinion of internships as a selection method with the universally negative response to the asymmetric video exercises. One is a completely technology based process, with no live interaction, the other is as far on the opposite end of the spectrum as it could possibly be, where employee and employer get to know each other in an authentic work environment.

This contrast encapsulates one of the key themes in this case study, and that is the emotional difficulty of coping with some of the dehumanising aspects of modern day job-hunting. This is explored in Chapter 13. There was a very common desire among the Participants to be treated as an individual and be given the chance to express their personality and unique skills, but there was a very common experience of being treated as a number in many applications. Internships and asymmetric video exercises demonstrate both ends of that spectrum.

It seems clear that internships, role-plays and analysis tasks create a very individual experience, with much human interaction and close personal assessment of the candidates' abilities and approach. This contrasts sharply with some of the other

selection techniques such as online tests,¹⁰⁸ asymmetric video exercises,¹⁰⁹ and even some competency based interviews.¹¹⁰ Therefore I suggest these are “humanising” selection methods, providing another reason for the positive perspective of the Participants.

Despite the wide range of activities, and the fact that over 80% of students experienced at least one of these “other selection activities” only just over half experienced these in successful job applications. This means that almost half the successful applications did not utilise any of these other selection activities. Instead, the hiring decision was made most often on the basis of the traditional selection technique of the interview and CV. Therefore it is to the interview I now turn.

¹⁰⁸ See Chapter 7.

¹⁰⁹ See Chapter 8.

¹¹⁰ See Chapter 9.

Chapter 9 - Interview

Introduction

The intention of this thesis is to focus on the techniques and activities employers used to assess the skills and suitability of early-in-career business graduates for job selection. The emphasis is on tests and exercises as proof points rather than the traditional interview. This is partly because there is already a large body of literature on the effectiveness of interviews,¹¹¹ but also because interviews are not a direct assessment of most skills.¹¹² However, we have now looked at the activities used by employers in the selection process for this case study. While there are a wide variety of tasks the statistics show that the interview (combined with a CV and/or an application form) remains by far the dominant selection tool.

89% of Participants experienced interviews during their transition,¹¹³ in an average of seven applications with a range of 0-30 applications.¹¹⁴ In terms of activities experienced this was second only to submitting the initial CV and/or application form experienced by 91%.¹¹⁵ 85% of job offers required an interview.¹¹⁶ No other activity was even above 50% for successful job applications.¹¹⁷

This means that any study on the transition to work and how skills are assessed is incomplete without the interview.

Therefore this chapter looks at the interview, with some references to CVs and application forms. The first section provides a brief description of the range of features of interviews as experienced by the Participants, which are then classified into four different types. Each type is then discussed in detail. The penultimate section reviews the topics discussed in interviews before concluding. I concentrate on describing the experience of the Participants in the case, rather than an analysis of the effectiveness of interviews for which there is already much extant research.¹¹⁸

¹¹¹ See Chapter 3 and the section “employer and recruiter perspective studies”.

¹¹² One obvious exception being communication skills.

¹¹³ See Table 5

¹¹⁴ See Table 3

¹¹⁵ See Table 5

¹¹⁶ The 15% that did not have an interview yet still got a job offer were all where the applicant already knew the company through an internship or similar, discussed in Chapter 8.

¹¹⁷ See Table 6

¹¹⁸ See Chapter 3 and the section “employer and recruiter perspective studies”.

Description

The most striking finding regarding the interviews is the sheer variety of experience. It is difficult to find a typical interview model, as can be seen from the range of features found in the data:

- Interviews were by phone, Skype, face-to-face or a combination.¹¹⁹
- Interviews were most often with one or two people but could be up to a panel of five.
- The number of interviews prior to job offer ranged from 0-10.¹²⁰ li
- Interview length varied from as short as 10 minutes to as long as two hours, and were sometimes combined with other activities such as presentations, data analysis tasks, or role-plays.¹²¹
- Interviews could merge with social events such as lunch, dinner, coffee, or informal discussion with employees or other graduates.^{lii}
- Questions were based on competencies (the most common), hypothetical situations, corporate values, CV and experience, practicalities, discussions about the applicant and the employer, and informal, quasi-social chat.
- They could be informal or formal, and were often highly structured.

The interviews appear to have had several purposes, but the most important were articulating competencies and corporate values, and forming a bond that shows a candidate would “fit in”. The latter matches other research on the particular importance of fitting in (Brown, Hesketh and Williams, 2004; Rivera, 2015).

Types of interviews

All descriptions of interviews were coded as such and then analysed for details. This enabled me to develop a typology of interviews categorised according to their main purpose. The types of questions asked and therefore the implicit purpose of the interview fell into four categories.

Pragmatic

These were highly focused on the job itself. Questions were about availability, terms, and whether the applicant’s experience matched the role, and often based on talking through their CV. These were often used with contract positions, or where the applicant was already known to the employer through work experience.

This Participant explains how they prefer this approach:

Pz.08#3 (Cz.38# job) It was another sort of [what I call my] more favourite interviews which was a bit more casual, just sort of talking about previous experience, giving examples of [the] sort of projects [I’d done] and just generally more about talking through my CV, which is the one thing I always do, the only thing I ever take with me is a copy of my CV so I give one to the

¹¹⁹ Asymmetric video exercises were also a common experience but are discussed separately in Chapter 8.

¹²⁰ Zero applies to some of the job offers secured through internships discussed in Chapter 8.

¹²¹ For details on these activities please see the discussion in Chapter 8.

interviewer and one for me, they always refer to it in the interview, which works [for me] because I prepare that well.

Introductory

These were often run by a member of the HR team (often called an internal recruiter), nearly always by phone, and involved checking that the candidate came across reasonably well, that their CV appeared to be true, and might also cover basic cultural fit and competency questions.

Here a Participant describes a typical introductory interview:

Pz.14#1 (Cz.11#) it was mostly competency questions, talk me through your experience, that kind of thing, sort of a screener I think just from their perspective just to get to know the person behind the CV, see if they were competent in interview situations... [eg] Give me a situation where you took the lead on solving a problem, give me an example of a time you worked in a team, so just proving that, you know, the stuff you'd written on your CV was true and just examples of when you'd done that^{liii}

Although introductory and relatively informal,¹²² these were still crucial as they could be used to screen people out.^{liv} This Participant advises that candidates should take the opportunity to try and form a bond:

Pz.09#2 so the first stage of interview is pretty much always the same, it's just an overview of your CV and if you can kind of effectively own that interview my impression is that that generally goes quite well because the interviewers are sometimes a little bit awkward... they want to say can you just walk me through your CV, [but] most of the time they've not read the CV, they just want to know about you and they've got to fill half an hour so you know if you just start talking and then hopefully you go off on a tangent because they say, oh that's interesting, tell me more about that project and so that script of your CV you can probably prepare in advance.

Competency based

Many interviews (and application forms) focused on competency based or similar questions. Candidates would be asked about things like where they had shown leadership, or overcome a challenging situation, or demonstrated the corporate values, or they would be given a hypothetical situation and asked for a response. These were highly structured interviews, generally with boxes for the panel to complete.¹²³ A number of the candidates had equally structured responses ready and referred to using frameworks such as the STAR methodology¹²⁴. The key for these interviews was being able to articulate certain skills or experiences.

This Participant explains the STAR methodology, which was used by at least six of the Participants:

Pz.01#5 (Cz.49#) if they liked the sound of you went to [phone] interview first, which was not something I was used to and we were told to prepare for a series of questions. I still use it to

¹²² Several Participants mentioned doing these while in bed.

¹²³ See "the box fitting game" in Chapter 13.

¹²⁴ An approach to answering competency based questions by referring to Situation Task Action and Result.

this day when I'm being asked about stuff using the STAR methodology, so situation... what situation you were in, what the task was, how you actioned it and what was the result. So name a time you've been a leader in a team, name a time you've been innovative, kind of approach and we'd use that STAR methodology. Did the telephone interview, passed with flying colours – they told me there and then, okay we'll proceed you on to the next stage.^{lv}

Viewpoint of the Participants

Although competency based interviews could provide a welcome opportunity to demonstrate skills:

Pz.09#3 (Cz.15#) I think the second phone interview, which got a little bit more technical, gave me the opportunity to talk about the projects that I have been working on in slightly more detail with someone who is interested and can understand that sort of level of detail and level of complexity so again you know that was nice.

Overall the Participants were not particularly enthused by them:

Pz.21#5 (Cz.44#) it was very competency based, it was just I feel like another fact checker but just another screening thing, have a look at how he speaks, have a look at how he presents himself, things like that.

This Participant describes going into “auto-pilot” due to the repetitious nature of competency-based interviews:

Pz.07##12 (Cz.60#) then we had an interview which was really boring and just like a completely bog standard competency interview...

RTS# Okay, so you've had those a lot at different interviews, it sounds like?

Pz.07## Yeah and like a lot of the video interviews and things like start being the same, like the telephone interviews start being the same. It's just bad because you just end up like blah blah and you know it off by heart.

This Participant thought they are not the best way of judging people:

Pz.08#7 (Cz.39#) for me the competency based questions just put someone into a box and you can't really get their personality, the way they would react to situations, what they've done in the past and just how they conduct themselves whereas if you have a conversation with them and just sort of dig into what their answers are and just ask [more about] their examples I can gauge [them] much better.

Many described them as rigid box-fitting exercises and a barrier to creating a bond^{lvi} but they did see answering competency based questions as a skill you could learn, though this Participant concludes that personality and fitting in were nonetheless the most important aspects:

Pz.02#9 (Cz.62#) There was a competency-based interview, which for that I would say anyone could get through a competency-based interview because you just need to know what to say and you would say it. Your motivations for getting the role, whether you liked the role, don't play a real factor in it, it's more... of a screening interview than anything else. And then going along with that they were trying to get to know me and my personality and whether I would fit with the team. I would say that was the important bit.

Articulation not demonstration

Irrespective of these criticisms, competency based questions were widely used and almost all Participants had to learn how to articulate competencies, skills, hypothetical situational responses and corporate values in a way that would fit into the required boxes (literally) of different employers.

Note the use of the word articulate. I argue that this is not about demonstrating skills, as we saw in the various exercises described in Chapters 7 and 8. Rather, this is about creating a narrative to persuade employers that you have the requisite skills/values etc. This narrative creation is a skill in itself, as can be seen in the examples of using the STAR methodology. The conceptual difference between demonstration and articulation is explored in relation to signalling theory in Chapter 14.

This narrative creation can be very similar to learning a script. Pz.07##11 (Cz.60#) quoted above explained that she learns her answers to typical questions by rote, as is also indicated in the quote from Pz.02#9 (Cz.62#). Another Participant described her scripting process in detail:

Pz.18#7 (Cz.20#) I wrote down all the questions I thought they might ask me depending on whether it was Cz.20#-related or whether for me personally, like my strengths, my weaknesses, some of my experiences, and then on cue cards wrote out in that format the situation, what was the task and then just memorised it and practised it that way and make it flow, so there was practice involved.

This approach worked well for her during the assessment day:

Pz.18#2 (Cz.20#) while I was waiting again just refreshing and making sure I was happy with my answers, so again I could just look at the question and go okay this is my answer for this. So, in the interview the interview flowed really well. Obviously there were a few things that I wasn't quite sure on or I didn't answer as well as he wanted, I'm not sure, but that technique really helped me because obviously that's what employers want to know...

RTS# And did you guess the questions roughly?

Pz.18# I was quite disappointed not more of them came up, to be honest!

However, her successful experience can be contrasted with our particularly shy Participant who had also prepared answers, but was thrown by unexpected questions:

Pz.13#4 (Cz.31#) what I do think caught me off guard was the one-to-one interview because I did go in there with the mindset of professional, so how I would react to 'what's your weakness, what are your strengths'... and then when they did ask me [what items would you take on a desert island¹²⁵]... I just, it was very basic and I did notice that compared to the other candidates when they were getting interviewed I came out pretty quickly so I guess there wasn't much of a conversation flowing in terms of what I was saying. So I think that created kind of a dead end with what I said.

I argue that articulating a skill is not at all the same as having one. It shows that you can “talk the talk” but not necessarily “walk the walk”. I also argue that the articulation itself is also a skill. A key finding of this thesis in relation to successful job

¹²⁵ His cat and his sketch pad.

offers, is that articulation (whether in the interview or on the CV) is the most common way of “assessing” skills given the overriding importance of the interview as can be seen in Table 6 (Keenan, 1995; Stewart and Knowles, 2000b; Carless, 2007). Therefore whether Participants actually possessed the relevant skills was largely not the point. The question was whether they had the skill to articulate them.

Fitting in

Another important purpose of interviews was whether the candidate would fit in to the team and the working environment. This is an amorphous and difficult to define element, and discussed in detail in Brown (2004) and Rivera (2015). Essentially, one way or another, by the end of the process there needed to be some sort of bond or connection.

This need to fit in and bond applied to all types of companies as this Participant explained:

Pz.19#3 (Cz.23#) A lot of companies obviously point... at the ability to be able to fit in with those who you're working with so I think that was of you know, high importance to them...

This entrepreneur explained how crucial the right fit is for start-ups:

Pz.04#1 (Cz.10#) for start-ups it's usually you go in for a chat and like it's based on gut

And therefore why she made sure she converted a phone call interview to a face-to-face interview as she felt it would be much easier to sell herself:

Pz.04#2 I think people buy people and like when you actually get in the room it's so much more powerful...

This Participant rejoiced in the opportunity to create a bond in an application for a global blue chip:

Pz.07##22 (Cz.17#) then we had an interview and I was so happy because it wasn't a... competency interview, it was kind of like really random questions that didn't really follow any sort of structure... it was much more open discussion and it wasn't me giving my answers, it was me saying a bit and then them questioning on it and then it was just in a way more flowing which was nice. Yes, so that was pretty good and again that was energetic and good.

And even for the internships that became permanent roles,¹²⁶ cultural fit was nonetheless critical as this Participant explained when asked why he thought he had been given a permanent job:

Pz.06#2 (Cz.45#) a passion and engagement for what the company is doing, to kind of be excited about it and believe in the values and the mission... and the culture which is very strong in Cz.45#. Cultural fit is probably one of the biggest ones but then for Cz.45# culture is probably one of the strongest aspects of the company so that would be more important than perhaps other companies.

¹²⁶ Described in Chapter 8.

Bonding with the boss

This Participant describes that even after a presentation, an analysis exercise, and nine interviews he felt the final decision depended on him being able to bond with the managing director over football:

Pz.17#3 (Cz.12#) the managing director one was...I didn't know, I was on edge, he was talking to me about football and I thought...

RTS# That's the one that sounds the most relaxed but you felt the most on edge?

Pz.17# Yes, exactly actually because I anticipated thinking this is the last hurdle, you know, if he doesn't like me then it's not good and if he does then I get the job and there was no instruction prior to say that this is what the interviews are going to consist of and yeah I was really on edge. It was the most nervous I've been and I would say I'm quite typically direct in conversation myself anyway so I went in there, he started talking about football and he's from Glasgow... and talking about my background and family and everything and yeah I was waiting for the questions on my degree and the questions on experience and then just... he made a joke at the end that I would be a great addition to the five-a-side team then and I thought [laughs] I didn't know how to react to that so yeah...

RTS# But luckily you knew what he meant [laughs].

This journey of starting with an introductory phone interview and working through a series of activities and interviews ending with a senior person with whom you needed to informally bond was not uncommon and this Participant describes her final director level interview:

Pz.07##13 (Cz.43#) I remember preparing for it and thinking it was going to be another one of those STAR questions but obviously directors don't really care. I remember it just being a chat, literally a chat, it was just me steering it more because I think I was just really interested in it, I was like how do Cz.43# do HR and asking her about her career and a lot of stuff.^{lvii}

Bonding hacks¹²⁷

The above is also an example of how the candidates themselves strove to take some control of interviews and deliberately create a bond.^{lviii}

This Participant advises on the importance of using interviews to establish your individuality and bonding potential and even quasi-deliberately extending the time:

Pz.01#6 (advice) if you're going to do it, do it in the interview. Be...

RTS# Be individual, you mean?

Pz.01# Yes because... then you're being asked why do you want to work for Cz.49#, why do you want to do this and that side of you can then come out and you can be yourself... if you get there and you're genuinely 'passionate' about the job then you'll be seen... so when you get to the interview and they ask you questions you should be going over time, or at least be trying – not consciously – minded I was meant to be there fifteen minutes I was there forty-five... Everybody thought I'd been abducted or something and I said, no we got in a really good conversation, that's how it should be.

A different technique of creating initial small talk is explained in Pz.02#10. However he also gives an example of when this did not work:

¹²⁷ Deliberately using game language.

Pz.02#4 (Cz.08#) Probably the hardest interview I've ever had in my life. I generally think I'm quite good at reading people. This guy, he's my Co.65# manager now, but was just the hardest person to read, I could not tell what he was thinking. Any small talk just didn't pan out.

RTS# Ah, so your normal strategy of ice-breaking didn't work

Pz.02# No, I tried everything, tried a bit of intellectual conversation, no it was just palmed off. There was a reason behind, he had his own strategy for doing it because he's not like that normally but he said in the kind of work that we're in you sometimes get really difficult candidates, you get really difficult clients as well and a lot of them are like that so he acted like one of the most difficult clients that he's ever had and wanted to see how I dealt with it.

RTS# Oh, so it was a test?

Pz.02# Yeah

During the interview the failure to bond and feel that he would fit in made it a "solid no" from him, until it was explained by the employer that it was in fact a test. Once he understood that and had a chance at a later stage to meet the team over coffee he changed his mind and accepted the job.

Works both ways

This initial "solid no" highlights that although the Participants generally had to prove that they would fit in, it could also work the other way around. And sometimes, despite enthusiasm from the employer, Participants ended the process because they did not feel they would fit in. This Participant described her discomfort in realising the employer sold very unglamorous construction boots:

Pz.11#1 (Cz.58#) and they took me to the kind of showroom where all the shoes are and kind of talked me through the different types of shoes and I remember just thinking, oh my gosh I stick out like a sore thumb... with my pretty floral top on.

She declined a second interview because she could not feel "passionate" about the product, even though she was "desperate" for work at the time. Nine¹²⁸ Participants withdrew from an application, two for reasons of pay and the rest at least partly because they felt they would fit in better elsewhere.

Bonding failure

Failure to show that you would fit in was fatal, as can be seen in this example of "wrong" answers:

Pz.05#9 (Cz.30#) [the interview] was even worse actually, I didn't enjoy that at all. I was quite nervous for it, and I just remember thinking the person on the end of the phone was doing a lot of interviews that day for a lot of people and they basically had a sheet with questions and they wanted you to just answer the questions and be done with it. And I also got the impression that there were set answers that they were looking for and he was trying to push me in that direction...[] and I could tell that he wasn't very happy with the answers I was giving even though I felt I was just being honest.

¹²⁸ See Table 14

Social elements

The ability to fit in was sometimes tested through social interactions such as lunch, dinner, coffee, tours or informal chats. Participants were aware that these may well be part of the process:

Pz.07##14 (Cz.60#) we were just chatting amongst ourselves, chatting to the 'old' graduates... just chatting forever. I was thinking I bet they're going to go back and report what we're saying^{lix}

However, bonding alone was not enough. There were also examples of candidates bonding well, showing they could be a good cultural fit, but not getting a job offer due to a perceived lack of skills^{lx}. It is clear that candidates need to be able to do both.

Discussion topics

In order to be able to have an interview, the candidate needs something to talk about. Whether they are aiming to create a narrative on skills and experiences, to generate a conversation to forge a connection, or to show their own distinctiveness, subject matter is required.

The main interview topics experienced by these Participants were examples of competencies/values/skills, responses to hypothetical situations, a CV tour, work experience, and more general professional-social topics. In the phone survey 81% of respondents said they had been asked about work experience in an interview, 77% had been asked about experience with customers, and 60% about current events.

This, then, is a summary of what was discussed. However, one of the most striking findings in this case study is what is not discussed: the degree itself. The content of degree itself was almost never discussed. In a few examples Participants talked about their dissertation,¹²⁹ and in one example the Participant was asked about finance modules for a banking role.^{lxi} Other than this, the course content, grades, what was learnt and assessed and how well they did was completely ignored.

The irrelevance of the degree content

The Participants revealed the irrelevance of the degree when asked whether it came up:

Pz.16#1 RTS# Did they ask you anything about your subjects or your grades or anything about your actual degree?

Pz.16# (Cz.61#) No, less, much less than you would have thought or you would have expected

Pz.08#4 No. Literally... the only thing that they've ever asked me is, it's says here that you did your degree between these years, but you've also had this experience from these years, how is that possible, and I would say well I worked full-time and I did my degree part-time in the evening and they're like, oh okay.

¹²⁹ An original piece of independent work they chose themselves and completed at the very end of the degree, but note Pz.14#18 who did not want to discuss the dissertation because he felt it would not help him stand out

Pz.05#12 I was never asked things like, what modules did you study and what did you enjoy studying, what did you do your dissertation on, anything like that... [but] things like being part of [social enterprise project], that was really useful in interviews because at that stage you don't have a lot of work experience and a lot of the questions are scenario-based, so I was able to draw on experiences like that, so I felt very grateful that I was given that opportunity.

RTS# So do you think that sort of stuff matters more than the actual degree itself?

Pz.05# Yeah, I think so.

RTS# So long as you've got the degree?

Pz.05# Yeah. Unfortunately, it does, it does seem like having the degree is a tick box and gets you through a door, but your experiences and things that you do around it are the most important in interview for talking points and that kind of thing.

RTS# So nothing on the content at all?

Pz.05# No, nothing.

RTS# So we could have taught interpretive poetry it wouldn't have made any difference?

Pz.05# Yeah... but I found talking about extra things that I did at university really helpful in interviews

And this Participant explains (rather mortifyingly for degree educators) that their personal training certificate seemed more important than the content of his degree or his results:

Pz.02#5 RTS# You haven't mentioned anywhere in any of these that they were interested in your grades or anything like that.

Pz.02# (Cz.08#) I think the only one that was important there was I have a personal training certificate and I did physio... I know that he was looking for people that are not just academic and people that are not just work, they're looking for a good mix of both and the fact that I had that and I had it on my CV I think helped.

A number expressed their surprise at this, as they grew to understand that what seemed so important while studying was of little or no interest to employers:

Pz.17#4 that's what I was shocked about the most because, you know, you go through a degree to kind of...well when I look back on it now it seems like a sort of passport for these jobs... and you know you need to have it but it doesn't necessarily separate yourself from a lot of the talent pool unless you have a USP [Unique Selling Point] like say you're from Pinetree that's a different experience. Yeah especially in Cz.12# no vested interest in what I actually achieved, no asking for transcripts.

Pz.11#2 it does make you think like, it is a big part of my CV, you know the uni I went to and the kind of stuff I did and I'm surprised that more of them didn't ask about it actually.

Pz.03#2 It is sad that that is the case, that you spend so much time working on a degree and it's almost a route [sic] of passage...and... in interviews if that isn't brought up at all then it's...in some ways surprising as well that they wouldn't focus on that, even getting a few minutes ... to talk about the degree and what you learnt.

Pz.14#2 [it] is a shame because actually I think having a business degree does allow you to hit the ground running better than any other degree could do because you have the context... I see all the graduates come in and it takes them six months to pick up that side of working life

and it's you know kind of instant to pretty much anyone who went here, all my peers in my year.

When Participants did talk about their degree they invariably meant the extra-curricula experiences, not the formal syllabus of the degree itself:

Pz.14#3 I would have talked about... the different stuff we did outside so mostly like the workshops that we do I definitely would have talked about so going like on industry days or having companies come in and talk or doing like miniature projects like we did in the first year with Pz.65#, stuff like that, like the extra-curricular stuff that we do. I wouldn't necessarily talk about the actual content of the course that I studied, no. I never would discuss that really...

Somewhat disconcertingly he then goes on to explain how subjects may well be relevant and useful for the job, and yet still not asked about in interviews and never used in practice:

Pz.14#4 Something like business strategy that's on the module is like it's so useful to have all of that knowledge and it never came up and it's on my CV, it says I studied business strategy and no-one ever asks, 'oh what does that mean', and I think about some of the frameworks really quite often at work and it seems like non-one else does... it seems like not one person other than me has read a business book [laughs] which is... strange...

What a lesson on relevance for business schools!

Yet despite this, the Participant was very clear the degree was essential to be selected:

Pz.14#5 it's like a tick box... I don't think they necessarily care much about that now, graduates are cheaper partly but also if you've done a degree... it's like an insurance point... just check it off. But it doesn't matter what they've done, in my company people have done [degrees] in history and English and all sorts of degrees. It's just kind of like you've got a degree, okay that's cool

The degree as a tick box

This concept of the degree as a tick box, a thing essential but not sufficient, came through very strongly:

Pz.20#2 I think that often having a degree is quite a standard requirement for going for certain jobs, for example if I was going for a graduate role even though [my] experience might be more valuable to them if it's a graduate role I need to be a graduate [laughs] and so having a degree is something that I guess is one of the foundations when it comes to... making sure you can get past being screened for a role, I would say. It's one of those... and I don't want to put down the value of a degree but I feel a hygiene factor might be a way to rub it in [sic] from my experiences.

Pz.08#5 I've always wondered about... how much value they actually place on what kind of degree you have and whether it is just a tick box exercise for them. I think in most cases in my experience it is just a tick box, has he got a degree, yep... they've always asked me about my previous work experience but never about education, never

Pz.02#6 I work quite closely with the director at Cz.08# and he does all the hiring and he always looks at the degree, if they have a good degree, if they have a 2:1, if it was from a good university then fine, that's how you essentially get through to interview stage. That

coupled with any previous experience that you've had, I think in the role that they are looking for in a consultant position they are looking for someone that has jumped out of their comfort zone, I guess, so have been travelling, had various roles, you know, done an internship, not just finished university and then laid around and not really done much until something fell in their lap.

And many of the Participants understood why this as an inevitable result of the democratisation of the higher education experience:¹³⁰

Pz.14#6 I think it's partly because everyone just takes a degree for granted, 'everyone has a degree' kind of attitude to looking for graduates and it's kind of then like well we know you've got a degree, everyone has a degree, what else did you do, so the focus of what is talked about in interviews and what is populating your CV is, okay the degree's there but tell me a bit more about everything else because that's what stands you out from everyone else who has a degree.

Pz.15#4 I don't think [a degree has] got the same, what's the word, it's not held as a - a small group of prestigious people that have gone to university, it's very open and inclusive now, which is great, but obviously then naturally that level then becomes a standard. Then you need to have something else then on top. So, for some jobs I think that a degree is not enough.

Second syllabus

The formal degree may have become a commodity, but not so the extra-curricula activities. These were highly valued by virtually all Participants, and part of their "unique selling point"(USP) in the competition for jobs. They often proactively sought opportunities to discuss them in interviews, and drew on their experiences to answer interview questions:

*Pz.07##19 I think [employers] are used to dealing with people who are like just come out of university and so nervous... whereas... I think I was very confident in my answers because they were very real, I wasn't making anything up and everything I did I was very interested in. I'd done like the Pz.65# internship which wasn't so great but you could use it to talk about how you turned around an experience... and then loads of different stuff at the university... that's all they're looking for - a real understanding of current affairs, of what's going on. And I think just because you know all of that you're almost relaxing and want them to ask you stuff because these are fun conversations to have.*¹³¹

What became clear during the research was that for this set of graduates, a degree was essential to get an interview, to get a foot in the door as it were, but it was the additional activities that got them the job offers.

This Participant puts it well when asked about the purpose of a business degree:

Pz.06#3 Well the obvious part is to give you a foundation understanding of business and all the different levers that exist. I would say much more important than that is the opportunity to do [other things] as well, whether that's engaging with industry, short projects, teamwork, actually trying to build a business, anything practical, working with people I think is probably much more important, I would say more important yeah.

¹³⁰ I do not like to use the phrase "massification of HE" as I see it as pejorative. I prefer "democratisation".

¹³¹ See how Pinetree was viewed as a USP signal in Chapter 10.

*RTS# Okay. I'm quite interested, listening to the graduates, on what in my own mind I've started to call the 'second syllabus'...*¹³²

Pz.06# Well everyone's got a degree [now] – how do you tell a hundred people apart if they've got a 2:1 or First degree in business? You look at the 'second syllabus' I guess.

Conclusion

The vast majority of Participants had to give a successful interview in order to be offered a job. The opportunity to interview was often only granted once they had passed several gateways first. This might be making it through the first sift of CVs and application forms (checking for amongst other things that they had a degree), or it could be after a range of tests and activities, especially for graduate schemes.

The variety of experience is such that graduates need to be prepared for anything, including the unexpected. Interviews could be by phone, Skype, or face-to-face with a range of panel sizes, lengths, question types, and informal or formal styles. They could be combined with other activities (such as presentations) or with quasi-social events. Most importantly, candidates need to be able to articulate skills and competencies that match the needs of the company, and use any technique they can devise to build a connection and show that they would be able to fit in with the team.

To do this, they need a rich extra-curricula experience to build on in interviews. Grades and course content were almost completely irrelevant for interviews, though they may be relevant for the initial sifting stage.¹³³

This leads me to the following question: if the degree itself is never discussed in interviews, but the second syllabus almost always is, and if the interview continues to be the single most important selection tool, then in relation to employment outcomes (provided you get through the initial sift), does that not mean that everything hinges on the second syllabus?

¹³² Meaning everything other than the formal degree syllabus and therefore including extra-curricula activities, networking, internships and so on.

¹³³ Primarily having a 2:1, but this is not a universal requirement. Note that a number of employers are now reducing their minimum requirements (even the need for a 2:1) despite the increasing applications in order to be able to consider a more diverse range of applicants (Burt, 2017b).

Chapter 10 - Indirect Signals

We now move on to the second set of findings in chapters 10-13 that focus mainly on the second research sub-question: *“What other actions did the Participants undertake in their attempt to secure work and what other themes emerged that help us understand the phenomenon of early-in-career job-hunting?”* These chapters have a different feel to chapters 6-9 and are more dominated by discussion and analysis, while still containing substantial and important findings about the post-graduation transition experience.

Introduction

So far I have presented the findings on the range of activities set by employers and used to select candidates for employment. This lies at the core of the research question which seeks to explore the transition to work of this group of business graduates with particular reference to the nature of the proof-points required by companies. I have therefore covered all the activities that were asked about during the phone survey and the research interviews ie tests, teamwork exercises, presentations (written and oral), interviews and a range of other activities being internships, asymmetric video exercises, role-plays and data analysis exercises. In other words, Chapters 6–9 focused on the first research sub-question: *“What were the specific job selection activities and assessments set by employers as experienced by the Participants?”*

However, qualitative research should remain open to themes that materialise during data collection and analysis, and that were not necessarily predicted at the outset (Creswell, 2013). I found there were other important elements of the transition experience that emerged in the coding process rather than in response to the pre-planned questions discussed so far. The most relevant to the research question were indirect signalling, digital signalling, and networking. These could also be regarded as “activities” in a way, but rather than being prescribed by employers in the formal job-hunting process they are more often “techniques” adopted by the Participants themselves.

The next three chapters deal with each of these themes in turn, and together help answer the second research sub-question: *“What other actions did the Participants undertake in their attempt to secure work and what other themes emerged that help us understand the phenomenon of early-in-career job-hunting?”*

This chapter presents the findings on the first of these themes, on what I have called “indirect signalling”.

Many examples were found of signalling that were not directly related to skills and professional attributes per se, but nonetheless were a significant feature of the job-hunting process. These are essentially tactical in nature and during coding three broad categories were identified: playing to the gallery, signalling compliance, and signalling uniqueness. Each is discussed below.

Playing to the gallery

The Participants showed a high level of awareness that one must “play to the gallery”¹³⁴ in the graduate job market.

For example, a strong theme was the need to signal dedication to the specific company by showing effort, enthusiasm and commitment to the company’s “values”. Given graduates applied for an average of 40 jobs, with some at more than 300, this individual commitment is unlikely to be authentic, but it is part of the “show” that must be displayed to get through the gateways of recruitment.¹³⁵ This Participant explains how he managed this corporate adaptability:

Pz.13#7 I have adapted my CV to be more flexible so I’ve just changed a few key words to fit that role... So on my CV I’ve got this one line about ‘I’d very much like to work with x-company, x has always been a passion of mine’ so, yeah, I just keep it basic like that and then even in my cover letter I’ve got a little bit where I talk about the employer, so ‘I would very much like to work with x-company as its values stand for x x x’ so with one company I’d write diversity and innovation and for another I’d write inspiration, so just bits like that to fit with their values.

Applicants could adjust not only their cover letters but also their responses, behaviour and appearance in order to “play to the gallery” as required.

Lying

To do so some admitted that they lied:

Pz.07##23 (Cz.43#) it was like a test to kind of find out your personality type, which I thought was an actual test so I answered all of them [laughs] ‘kind of like this, kind of like that...’ not honest and then I went into [the interview] and they like presented you with your results – and it costs quite a lot of money for companies to do it, apparently – and they were, like, ‘we’re giving you the results for free’. And they were like ‘we’ve never seen a test like this... you haven’t shown highly on anything or low on anything, everything’s in the middle, do you want to talk me through your results and how it relates to you?’ So, yes, that wasn’t really a test, it was actually a genuine interest that they wanted to know what kind of personality type you are but I definitely read that one wrong

RTS# Was that like Myers Briggs?

Pz.07## Yes, something like that

RTS# So why did you decide to answer in that way?

Pz.07##... I thought it was a bit of a trick and they were looking for your weaknesses, of which I decided not to say any.

Pz.13#5 (Cz.31#) I think they were looking for a bunch of things. I mean, I had to lie on a few bits, well one of the questions was ‘what was the best piece of marketing you have seen in a shop’. I was stuck trying to remember, I mean I’ve been to Cz.43# and stuff and you’re not really concentrating on stuff like that so I just made a story about how at a game shop they were hosting an event and had people come in and do stuff.

¹³⁴ Deliberately using game language.

¹³⁵ See the discussion on players and purists in the literature review in Chapter 3 under “selection in action studies”

Some adjusted answers to what they thought employers wanted to hear:

Pz.15#11 (Cz.43#) they did [a] really random one, "How would your friends describe you in three words?"... (laughs) You don't want to say how your friends really would describe you... But you try and think... what an employer, the skills an employer wants in a person and then... try and match those two things... I struggled with that question. (Laughs)

Pz.01#12 (Cz.49#) I think that came up, name a weakness of yours and I think you have to be quite careful on those, you know...humility and honesty but don't say you're rubbish at the same time and where you'd be willing to improve.¹³⁶

Or repeated back to the employer what they had just heard:

Pz.01#17 (Cz.49#) I think that was definitely one element that I did quite well in my presentation...they gave an overview...about what the organisation is, what they're looking for, and I picked up some of the... tell tale signs that they were saying about the firm... and I remember incorporating that into my strategy that I was proposing which instantly made the guy smile and said yes, you were clearly listening.

Adjusting personality

Some consciously tried to modify their personalities:

Pz.01#13 In terms of how I intended to behave, I remember even having a tactical discussion with my best mate on this one, as a character I may be more overt and louder than others but thought, temper it, don't be that person... be somebody they remember but not in a 'oh god, I remember him' adverse way. Temper it, I think was the way to do it.

Pz.10#1 I... dressed very smart, spoke politely, didn't raise my voice or anything, didn't get excited over it, didn't pre-empt any situation. I remember sitting upright posture and even though it was informal I treated it as though it was formal.

Pz.20#3 So it's quite a cliché but always make sure I'm smiling...

RTS# And why do you deliberately make sure you're smiling?

Pz.20# Because if you're quite positive then it just makes for a nicer experience and also I think it makes a better impression on the interviewer just generally just being warm and friendly and chatty

"Performing" teamwork

A particularly interesting example of modifying one's personality related to teamwork. As described in Chapter 6 the teamwork exercises were highly artificial constructs. Participants were very aware of this and conscious of needing to behave in a certain way:

Pz.01#19 (Cz.49#) I recall them asking the group and the brave were going to stand up and say their piece, again you had to respectfully chip in probably but not be the one who was pushy, a degree of humility I think probably helped [laughs]^{lxii}

¹³⁶ Another example of the goldilocks game, and the need to get it "just right". See also "performing teamwork" below.

Many understood the point was inclusion, not winning, though in the following example the Participant managed to do both in a very sophisticated manoeuvring of signals in this teamwork exercise (applicants had to debate investment plans for the company):

Pz.02#11 RTS# And so what happened....?

Pz.02# We went with naval, the one that I wanted, yeah.

RTS# So even though you weren't pushing through your idea particularly you did actually...[win]

Pz.02# Yeah I did it more passively so I let them fight it out to begin with and at that point they had already got rid of space and they had some really rubbish reasoning behind it which I didn't really understand... I wasn't going to argue because I didn't want it anyway, so I let them get rid of that. I was asking questions as I went along just to show I was still engaged and not just sitting back... asking questions and prodding and I guess that was the only other time I would say it was a bit underhanded what I was doing, because I would purposely ask questions to pit different teams against each other without really saying what I was going for. Though not saying that I was going for naval but saying 'why do you think the air and defence would be better than, you know, helping the army' and then the two that had chosen it would just be like 'well I think it's this'. One of them would go and then all I would need to do is pitch naval and no-one else had been talking about naval but I'd know everything that I need to know about why air and defence is not good enough or why space isn't good enough so in the end it came down to air and defence and naval so all I did was reinstate all the negatives that the other guys in the team had said about air and defence and, you know, that way I really had a team supporting me and then we got rid of air and defence and then I pitched naval...

He had even made sure he knew the exact signals the employer would be looking for, by speaking to his connections at the company:

Pz.02#12 They told me all the factors that they wanted... listening, selling your idea, influencing, persuasion and then getting buy-in. So they didn't tell me how to do it but they told me what the five points [were] that they wanted and it was easy to put everything into place when I did it.

Choosing dress

Dress played an important role and was seen as a subtle but not insignificant signal:

Pz.19#4 I suppose again that I learned to understand that you are actually your own brand so you have to position yourself in a way that the person who's interviewing you has confidence in you, you know. How you present yourself, look your best when you go to the interview, dress appropriately and obviously no jeans, you know. If you're applying for a corporate position, it's corporate wear. If you're applying to a company that's a bit relaxed I would still you know be, smart... my take on it would be the person is looking at you, obviously appearances makes a difference and first impression counts. So it's how you present yourself to them so I was always smartly dressed and tidy and on time.

Dress was used to demonstrate effort:

Pz.05#13 I think in my mind I always like to be smart, too smart [rather] than too casual so I would always be quite smart for interviews I think... I think it does say a lot about who you are. And it's first impressions as well, it shows that... you've thought about it and you want to come across well and you're taking it seriously.

Pz.16#2 It's about the impression you want to give and if you're wearing a suit with a nice tie and shirt and you've cared about it, plus one thing I've noticed from being the other side is it sometimes adds distractions. If you've buttoned your shirt wrong you're always going to have the impression that person's buttoned their shirt wrong so you almost want to make yourself smart but a blank canvas almost... neutral so not distract from what you're saying^{lxiii}

And helped ensure that applicants could appear relaxed:

Pz.07##24 Obviously, dress smart, you know, not too showy, just dressing comfortable so you can actually do the task and you're not thinking about how tight the skirt is; you need to be able to relax.

Pz.08#6 always wear a suit [and tie]... It's just first impressions and I feel more confident wearing a suit – I know it sounds ridiculous... I think it commands just a little bit more respect [laughs]^{lxiv lxv}

For some dress was about signalling fitting in:^{lxvi}

Pz.01#20 I remember going smart, double-breasted suit as always... especially for a company... I think you choose your company, again you know what culture you're going into. If you're going in to you know Cz.67# or Cz.69# where they just don't wear suits maybe you'll look slightly out of place and it does send signals, it definitely sends signals, but in Cz.49#, you know consultancy firm I expected suited and booted was the way to go and I was right.

Pz.02#14 I always keep a tie with me but I never really wear it... Just in case. Just in case I walk in and everyone is wearing a tie. I'd want to be in a tie...

Although this Participant drew a line at how far he was willing to go in obsequy:

Pz.09#9 my friend told me, he called me on the morning of the Cz.07# interview and obviously of the big four consultancy firms Cz.07# is green... is it green? I don't know, one of them's red, one of them's blue, he said 'what colour's your tie?' and I said 'red I think' and he was like 'no no no you need to get yourself a green tie, go on'.

RTS# [laughs] So did you?

Pz.09# No I didn't... if anyone cares about the colour of tie that I'm wearing I don't want to work there, I think that's just ridiculous

RTS# But you still cared enough to wear a tie?

Pz.09# Yeah

Motivations varied, but it was well recognised that the way you dressed communicated certain attitudes to employers. Interestingly, despite the need to signal uniqueness (discussed below), there were no examples of dress being used for that purpose.¹³⁷

¹³⁷ Which is interesting as I personally use dress in that way.

Signalling compliance

Applicants used indirect signalling to show that they were committed to the particular company, and that they were able and willing – even eager – to comply with its values and outlook.

Researching the employer

The ability to research the company could of course be a direct signal of research, but here we are looking at the indirect signalling role it plays in indicating interest, effort, and agreement with corporate values. Research ensures applicants can play the echo chamber game,¹³⁸ feeding back a level of dedication to that specific company that they believe the employer wants to hear. It was seen by many as important as it signals interest in the company, that you are willing to make an effort, and therefore genuinely want the role.

Pz.08#8 Research, yes. A lot of the time I think it's a little bit of lip service for them because it's kind of... just kind of what they want to hear...

Pz.17#5 I [do] a lot of... research on the company, any current affairs that's going on with that company... because, you know, if they ask you a question about it, it just makes you look better... like how is best to sell myself whilst also knowing enough about the company that it seems like I've invested and actually interested in the opportunity because if you come across good personally but you don't have a vested interest in the role then that's probably the last thing that they want to see.^{lxvii}

It was interesting to hear that some companies want to make it difficult to research them in order to push up the effort required:

Pz.14#12 (Cz.11#) You can do as much research as you like but I know my company is purposely vague on their website because they want you to like really do your research before you come

While at the same time Participants found pragmatic techniques to make research easier and quicker and lower the required effort:

Pz.07##16 I always read their [the company's] annual report because that gives you like a piece of 'gold' that's great... It tells you everything – you don't need to do anything else. Annual report and the news... Honestly, when you haven't got much time you've got to find quick ways of doing things

Showing interest

Deliberately planning to ask questions was seen as a technique to signal interest in the employer:¹³⁹

Pz.14#8 you want to look like you've prepared, it comes back to that same old thing, you want to have questions because you just want to show that you have thought about it and you are genuinely interested...

¹³⁸ Deliberately using game language.

¹³⁹ Although my heart sinks when people do this as to me it signals either being too needy or that they are deliberately signalling.

This Participant was particularly candid about the tactical signalling role of faux questions when asked why he had been successful in one particular application:

Pz.02#15 (Cz.08#) I think one [thing] he said he liked [was] the preparation that I had. So I had a book full of notes and I was making notes as the interview went along

RTS# This is the very first interview ...

Pz.02# Yes. Taking notes as I went along and then to flip the page I had a page-long list of questions that I wanted to ask anyway

RTS# And why had you done that?

Pz.02# No real reason, I just wanted to show that I wanted to ask questions. I tell my brother the same thing, I was like 'it doesn't matter if you don't have questions to ask but you always want to ask questions just to show that you are interested'... so I would say most of those questions I didn't really care what the answer would be, it wouldn't have made a difference in my decision making, I was just going to ask those questions, so that was one of things that he said, I like the fact that you came prepared with questions.

The questions may have been for show, but he clearly judged correctly on the impact it would have on being offered a role. Is this a cynical example of signal manipulation or is it simply understanding how to play the game? Or is it a demonstration of a high level of emotional intelligence?

Demonstrating values

It was especially important to signal that you both knew and “lived” the values of the company, and chameleon like graduates adapted their applications to do so. This could be in the CV, the application form, or during activities and interviews:

Pz.13#6 when I do prepare I usually just read up on the company. What I do look at a lot is their values, their mission, because what they say there you can fit into your own ideology when you're speaking about them so I could say something that relates to them. I might not think [that] about myself but if it fits in with my character then I can actually spin it to apply to myself.

Pz.07##25 I learned this that they all do, base it on their values so it was kind of a question per value... They'd always like swing it towards their values so you kind of knew what was coming and as long as you kind of paid attention to the values then they liked the answer^{lxviii}

This game of “value snap”¹⁴⁰ is a curious phenomenon. If it is so easy for applicants to adopt values, are they really values at all? Can one really be committed to someone else's values that change with every job application? This seems more akin to choosing the right coloured tie than showing alignment with something genuinely meaningful. Wearing the right coloured tie was a step too far for one Participant^{lxix}, yet ironically value adaptability seems to be regarded as good job-hunting practice (Trought, 2017). Perhaps it could be argued, in fact, that rather than indicating any ethical perspective or graduate skillset, this is really about signalling willing corporate compliance.

¹⁴⁰ Deliberately using game language.

Another interesting phenomenon is the apparent need for companies to feel special and sought after – and individual. Certainly the Participants in this case study perceived that they must make each company think that they really want to work for that specific company. The reasons given here for researching the company, demonstrating effort and interest, and matching values are in essence all about making that company feel unique. Ironically this is the exact opposite of what many applicants experienced themselves as discussed in Chapter 13. Subtly signalling this bespoke commitment seems to have become an essential ingredient in successful job-hunting, and it potentially raises difficult ethical questions for the role of the university in preparing students for such a process. To what extent should universities help shape graduates to comply with corporate values and to dissemble at will with every new application process?

Signalling uniqueness

We now come to the fundamental paradox that lies at the core of the graduate job-hunting experience for these Participants. On the one hand, they had to make it through the initial sift in order to get an interview and ultimately a job offer. This generally meant complying with employer expectations in terms of CV and application form, and often online tests and exercises, as well as radiating all the “willing compliance” signals discussed above. In signalling theory terms, this means becoming part of a pooling equilibrium – the potential talent pool that will be seriously considered by employers.

However, once through to the pool, the rules of the game change and the applicants must now demonstrate how they stand out from the crowd. They must give the employer a reason to employ them as an individual, by demonstrating their unique value, or “USP” to use a common phrase of the Participants. In signalling terms they must now become part of a separating equilibrium where individuals can be placed in a hierarchy of desirability. This Participant explains:

Pz.01#21 (Cz.49#) It's a very tough market, there's no doubt about it and I... you know more and more I feel – and the way I got through Cz.49# is – you have to try and inject your personality into that big, big ether because, yes, no matter who thinks you're great at university or even if you feel like, 'god I really could do that job and I know I could do it and I'd be brilliant at it', at that first contact you are just in a sea of other people and it's really difficult.

The Participants described several approaches to establishing uniqueness.

Pinetree as a USP signal

One common view was that the Pinetree experience is itself a USP that would give graduates an advantage against those from more traditional universities. In their view this is because of the fact that it is new, that it is the first higher education provider to be set within a FTSE 100, and that it provides a rich range of employer engagement opportunities. The very features that might screen them out of the pool of applicants (not being a traditional elite university) were the same features that allowed these graduates to demonstrate difference, if they made it through the early sifting:

Pz.03#3 one thing which I've always thought... is that it's a really positive because of the way which Pinetree is set up and the experiences that you get are so different to other universities, it really gives you that edge because you always have something to talk about in interview... I have a wealth of things I could have talked about all the industry days that we did... the hackathon that I organised and ran... and there was some really interesting stuff that I did with the internships and the projects I worked on, so all of that and even Pinetree as an idea and a concept is fascinating because if you talk about they're always really interesting, they go 'oh I've not heard of that' and 'I've never come across Pinetree' but they've normally heard about Big Pine and then they're putting two and two together and they're fascinated that you're actually studying within Big Pine's premises and you're getting that exposure to business so it's a really interesting thing to talk about.^{lxx}

Constructing USP signals

A number of the Participants found ways to creatively construct USP signals themselves.

For example, this one developed her own technique for injecting difference into interviews:

Pz.07##26 (Cz.17#) so again just looked over their values, I remember I watched some TED videos – they always inspire me, you can steal different phrases from them and sound clever tomorrow... I think it's helpful if you look at things that are outside of what they're asking to do so loads of TED talks, loads of podcasts, get your brain out of the academic way of thinking
RTS# And why is that?

Pz.07##... it just helps you to think in a different way and if they're asking you a question you can bring in something random which you've seen here and connect it and... it kind of makes you stand out a little bit more

Here she captures the essence of the paradox:

Pz.07##27 You've got your bog standard [answers] and those are pretty much engrained in your memory from the very start because you've done the applications, you've done the telephone interviews, now you need to look for something different [from other applicants].

Other examples included work experience^{lxxi}, deliberately maximising personal engagement in presentations^{lxxii}, and choosing a presentation topic on their own personal values^{lxxiii}.

This one was particularly creative in constructing her own authentic assessment activity to prove skills and to signal uniqueness and enthusiasm:

Pz.04#3 (Cz.10#) what I did from the tech point of view is [the employer] had an app and it was a babysitting app so the babysitter and the parent and I went in, logged in as the babysitter on one phone, logged in as the parent and hired myself, I found their bugs and stuff in it ... I actually sent them a really detailed email of feedback...

RTS# So you did this off your own back?

Pz.04# Oh yeah. So... 'hope you are well and the rest of your interviews are going well. Here's my feedback'... yeah I think I just said like, 'what did you think?' Because they could see me doing it. Navigation, so adding pictures, credit card payment... it's actually really good feedback [for them]...

RTS# So why did you do this?

Pz.04# ...probably just to show off [laughs] I'm not going to lie!

RTS# [laughs]

Pz.04# 'I'm really good, I'm over here!' But just also to showcase that I had technical skills... Like very much, I'm very much on top of this, I really want this

Finally, as described in Chapter 8 several approached employers directly for opportunities, using the fact the employers already knew them as students or interns, in itself another type of USP. ^{lxxiv}

Taking a risk

Deliberately making oneself stand out from the crowd means – by definition – going against the flow, and that can take confidence and courage.

This Participant was relieved that his original approach to problem solving did not backfire:

Pz.01#11 (Cz.49#) we ended up with these bits of paper with sort of almost Lego block items, trying to figure out which way they were going to go in and I decided to, right these are falling apart so I'm going to Sellotape them all together and at the end of the assessment... one of the women who was running the assessment said, 'you stuck all these together', and I thought 'oh god what have I done now' because it was either, this is different or you've just made my life really hard and she didn't, she said 'you know nobody's ever done that, really interesting point' so I kind of wiped my head, said 'oh thank goodness for that'.

This contradiction between fitting in and standing out is perhaps best expressed in this moving interchange with one student who described her struggle with the paradox by relating the story of a guest speaker to Pinetree who advised on job applications:

Pz.15#10 He showed us 5 CVS and all of them from different people and they're pretty much absolutely identical. And they use the same key words and the same kind of approach and layout... and he said, 'what if your covering letter is just a... haiku poem or something... someone's gonna either go yes or no to it instantly, but just that different approach. They see so many CVs just try and do something different.

RTS# So you would try and...

Pz.15# Match what they're looking for.

RTS# But also try and have something expressed a little bit differently to what you think others might be expressing?

Pz.15# Yeah. I'd probably try to do that and in reality it probably doesn't work.

RTS# Well, you've ended up with two job offers...

Pz.15# That's what I'd would love to- I'd love to be brave to do what he said and just do that poem. And I try and you know, have that mindset but it probably just ends up very standard just like everyone else's (laughs).

RTS# Because matching the key words to what they have in their website is the opposite of the haiku poem, isn't it?

Pz.15# Yeah, really, yeah.

RTS# Yeah (laughs) unless you use their key words to make a haiku poem.

Pz.15# Yes, that would be a better idea. Yeah, see, so it doesn't, that mindset isn't, it doesn't [come easily]...

RTS# Well I don't know from what you've said you're very aware of like the way that they would search. Like if they search for key words, and you've got a haiku poem without any key words in it then it's...

Pz.15# It's not going to come up.

RTS# So you might be very sensible what you're doing.

Pz.15# Yeah.

And perhaps these Participants are right to be cautious about expressing too much individuality, given the importance of “fitting in” to secure an offer, as discussed in Chapter 9 on interviews^{lxxv}.

This requirement to be both compliant and distinctive, to fit in and to stand out, appears to be one of the key complexities of the modern graduate job-hunting experience.^{lxxvi}

Conclusion

Many of these examples of indirect signalling are decidedly tactical, some might even say disingenuous. Brown describes the applicants in his study of graduate schemes as being either players or purists – the latter essentially being more honest and authentically themselves, and the former essentially faking it (Brown, Hesketh and Williams, 2004). I would suggest the situation is far more complex^{lxxvii}. One could argue that the ability to present and perform in a certain way to please the employer is itself a sign of emotional intelligence. It certainly shows effort and even a willingness to learn, often said to be the most important skill employers seek (Rainsbury *et al.*, 2002; Coll and Zegwaard, 2006; Branine, 2008; Rospigliosi *et al.*, 2014; AGR, 2016). It could even be seen as signalling an ability to “perform” “appropriately” with clients. On the other hand, one could argue that the whole transition process operates in an ethical vacuum based on enforced corporate compliance in the name of “graduate skills and attributes” that amounts to little more than a flattering echo chamber.

However, I propose an alternative conceptualisation and that is to see the transition experience as a Zero Sum Game, with levels, rules, rewards, and special powers. A game that is dominated by the use of signals sending information and misinformation, data and faux data, to all parties in a variety of ways.

And one of the most interesting findings in this study is the emergence of a whole new set of signals particularly apposite for the age; digital signals. The next chapter focuses on this new type of signalling.

Chapter 11 - Digital Signalling

Introduction

A second theme that emerged strongly from the coding of the data was the importance of what I have termed “digital signalling”. This is not simply using digital formats to display information, but the use of digital signalling as a tool in itself, by both employers and candidates, to indicate things beyond the information itself. I argue that this is a significant and evolving development of the way signalling works in practice, and could have fascinating repercussions for the theory.

This chapter is structured around the key manifestations of digital signalling that emerged during analysis. Firstly, the importance of LinkedIn as the leading portfolio of professional digital signals is explored. I then turn to the use of key words which essentially provide digital search terms presented by applicants and sought by employers and recruiters. Key words are even used by search algorithms in the early sifting process. The next section looks at the use of digital screening, before concluding.

Digital signalling is pervasive, so all these sections are inter-connected. There are also links to some of the assessment activities discussed in Chapters 7-10, particularly online tests, asymmetric video exercises, and aspects of the traditional interview and CV, such as the use of key words in the game of “value snap”. The emotional impact of the use of technology is discussed in Chapter 13.

Therefore although this is one of the shortest chapters in this dissertation, it is central to the overall job-hunting phenomenon. Here we focus only on the lived experience of these Participants, but this is an important area for future research.

LinkedIn

The portfolio of professional signals

I propose that LinkedIn has become the modern day signaller.¹⁴¹ The literature on signalling calls for more research on the use of portfolios of signals (Connelly *et al.*, 2011). Listening to the Participants as recent new job-hunters, it is very clear that for them LinkedIn has become the most important portfolio of signals for professional identity.

In other words, LinkedIn is now the centre point of one’s digital professional profile. This is not static but a portfolio of signals that builds over time:

Pz.01#22 [LinkedIn is] a great tool for tracking what you’re doing. You know, you have internal Cz.49# CV, you’ve got your external facing CV and it’s a right pain trying to coordinate

¹⁴¹ There are also other social media tools such as Facebook, Twitter etc but they are not focused on professional communications and are beyond the scope of this thesis. The extent to which they are used to signal professionally would be another area for research.

everything so I treat my LinkedIn as... my central repository. At least I know what I've been up to and it's telling the world so I've always got that benchmark.

Mutual signalling

Whereas traditional signalling theory tends to focus on one way signalling from the applicant as the seller to the employer as buyer (Akerlof, 1970; Spence, 1973; Lofgren, Persson and Weibull, 2002), in the digital world of LinkedIn it works both ways, as employers themselves are also providing information and signals to prospective applicants through the profiles of their employees, whether intentionally or not.

Many Participants used LinkedIn as part of their research into prospective employers, analysing the information for signals about how to behave, or to get an insight into the corporate culture. These Participants explain why they looked people up on LinkedIn:

Pz.08#9 Well it's just so you know when you walk into the room... who you're walking in with and... you know what to say to them and you might be able to gauge what they would like to hear based on their experience and where they've worked rather than if you go in cold you have no idea what that person's like or what their experience is.

Pz.14#10 just to get a sense of them and also... I always look at how long people have been at the company, you just want to know that, you want to get a feel for... are people staying there long, do they leave quickly, what's the kind of turnover like

LinkedIn as a signalling tool

More interestingly, LinkedIn is used for more than a source of signals. It is also a recognised signalling tool in and of itself.

Failure to use it could be interpreted by the employer as a lack of interest:

Pz.14#11 [I do] a lot of research on what the company does... a little bit about the competitors... what the industry they're in is like, where they stand... as much as possible... even to the extent... if the person who emails you, you look them up to see what their background is

RTS# So why do you do that?

Pz.14#... I don't know, you just want to look like you've done your homework a little bit, you don't want to be caught out, just to look like you care even

Here the Participant uses it to manufacture a digital signal of faux interest:

Pz.02#16 I'll make it a point to go on to LinkedIn and find the hiring manager. Whether I look at his profile or not doesn't really make a difference, only that he gets the notification that I have looked at his profile.

RTS# Oh, right! Now, why, tell me why

Pz.02# It gives them the impression that I'm being proactive and that I'm doing my research even though I may not be. I guess that's more of a political aspect of the whole recruitment process.

Others were equally aware of the digital signals generated by LinkedIn activity, but took the exact opposite strategy:

Pz.17#6 RTS# And did you try and find out if you knew anyone at the company...?

Pz.17#... well I looked on the websites obviously... I didn't want to type people in LinkedIn because obviously it will show that you've viewed their profile so I didn't know if that was going to be too keen or not but I didn't really

Note the difference between the use of the website (no digital signals generated) and LinkedIn. Candidates seem increasingly aware of their digital footprint.

Key words

The Participants explained that much of the activity on LinkedIn is based on algorithms focused on certain key words^{lxviii}. Key words are not only used on LinkedIn. As will be seen below key words are also researched and identified by Participants and deliberately used in the way they draft their CVs, give presentations, answer questions, or perform in other activities. They are also built into digital algorithms, literally searched for by employers and recruiters in order to sift applicants (Cappelli, 2012; Lam and Hawkes, 2017; Trought, 2017; Anon, 2018a).

I argue that the key word has become a leading new type of signal and many of the Participants were aware of this. They are generated by the companies in their adverts or websites (eg their values), and then found, identified and fed back by Participants, both digitally and in more traditional formats.

Adopting corporate dialects

The importance of key words, both in terms of finding them and recognising their importance, and then colonising them and turning them into one's own signals (part of the tailoring of the application process companies expect to see) has already been explored.¹⁴² Here we see how the use of key words enabled canny candidates to adopt corporate dialects:

Pz.11#3 (Cz.16#) So I... researched about the product, kind of the language that Cz.16# spoke... like on the website... I knew that I had to prove that I knew Cz.16# or had put efforts into understanding the company... I definitely think it helped that I said that I loved Cz.16# and... showed them I'd researched the brand et cetera.

Note that this candidate did not know Cz.16# even existed until told about the job opportunity by her recruiter, but quickly moved to "loving" Cz.16# and being able to demonstrate that. She used this language adoption technique with other applications as well:

Pz.11#4 (Cz.40#) that's probably helped me maybe get my first interview because reading the way they write about the tea and reading the way they write about their journey, I was trying to kind of replicate that

RTS# Oh okay so you were trying to resonate with them, look like you were already working there

¹⁴² See for example the discussion of the game of "value snap" in Chapter 10.

Pz.11# Yeah already talking like Cz.40# but yeah I think that helped and same with Cz.16#

The importance of being able to use key words, to sound like you already belong, is seen as necessary to make it through the sifting process:

Pz.11#5 (Cz.40#) they probably get millions, not millions but loads and loads of applications and they want to probably pick people that actually have taken their time to seriously consider the role and them as a company

Creating a feedback loop

Part of researching the company is finding the key words, and then being able to feed them back to the employer.

Pz.15#5 RTS# On what basis do you think that they were sifting? What were they looking for?

Pz.15#(Cz.55#) well they asked a lot specifically about their supply chain and about the specific role that you are applying for to make sure that you actually understood the terminology and their way of working and why it was different to other retailers. So they were making sure that you had those key words and all this information is on the... website you can read about it

This sounds very much like a game, and one is reminded that signalling is also a part of game theory (Tadelis, 2013). The company website can be seen as providing “treasure” or “special powers” in terms of key words (values, mission, key requirements, etc), candidates need to find the treasure and then use that in their fight for a role. This is a digital battle. If you are astute enough you can find these weapons – these special powers as it were – to assist you defeat others.

It matters not whether the applicant agrees with the key words. The point is to signal using them and reflect back to the companies what they want to hear.^{lxxix}

I suggest another way of looking at this is through the concept of “digital body language”. A number of studies have shown that greater empathy and connection can be built through literally reflecting other people’s body language (Van Baaren *et al.*, 2004; Tanner and Chartrand, 2006; Carey, 2008b; Guéguen, Jacob and Martin, 2009; Porges, 2011). Here one can see a similar concept digitally.

Digital honey pot

Signals are deliberately generated by Participants through the use of key words on LinkedIn in order to bring the recruiters and employers to them. The key words operate as “professional click bait”, as it were, reversing the traditional job-hunting experience.

Pz.09#4 so the thing is it’s the way that recruiters search as they say, you know ‘I’m looking for someone with a BSc and maybe an MSc’ and they, you know they’ve been given the job description so they’re just looking for key words in the job description and they then just plug those key words into LinkedIn and then if you’ve mentioned it a couple of times in your descriptions and maybe, you know, in the actual skill section then you’re probably the first to come up... the way their search algorithm clearly works is by just pulling out key words effectively so if you just say ‘key words are here, algorithm’ ding ding ding ding then it seems to have a quite a big impact.

He is effectively describing the game of “key word bingo”.¹⁴³ lxxx

This digital understanding, specifically how to get through filters and how to get employers to come to you, is one that the Participants were able to learn,

Whether while at Pinetree:

Pz.19#5 having the chance to actually get employers in and actually speaking to them... [about] how their system actually picks up on key words. So I had to highlight the key words that were posted in... the particular job description I was applying... to make sure that I don't actually lose out on the key words if ever there was a system in place that would just scan it and accept or reject the application... Because you know getting the chance to speak with employers who have like over a thousand applications a day whilst I was studying my business degree, was a real eye opener in terms of how it actually works and how your CV goes from the process of being submitted to actually being called for an interview.

Or through the experience of job-hunting:

*Pz.01#23 LinkedIn is useful again because... it understands what you're looking for. I didn't use it so much when I was going for my graduate job, what I do use it for now is... [to] build up my profile as I do some really cool projects and build up a reputation for myself... I used to panic so friends of mine were in work and say, 'oh I always hit up on LinkedIn' and I'm thinking, 'oh god why am I not getting touched' – now I've built up the profile and I've got experience, now I'm being contacted.*¹⁴⁴

The benefit of using digital signals for ongoing progression continues beyond securing their first job and into their career, as can be seen in the need to constantly “feed the profile”:

Pz.01#24 If you're on LinkedIn and you're doing a good job and you're feeding that profile, don't worry, you're going to get people contacting you and the system's going to understand what you're up to.

And to regularly adjust digital signals to increase the number of “hits”:

Pz.09#5 one of the things I did over the past year, which caused a huge spike in the number of people contacting me on LinkedIn was I updated my LinkedIn profile and added just key words to the each of the employment and education sort of sections... buzzwords, if you like. So I basically just said... this is what I did in the roles so... I built CRM systems that did this, this and this and then at the very bottom I would just... [add] key words... literally it would trundle along I think at about twenty five views per week, something like that, and then it shot up to about a hundred and fifty as soon as I did that

Or to improve status signals:

Pz.21# all employers were like, who's Big Pine? I didn't get a call back so honestly people...I changed up my LinkedIn, my CV from Pinetree to Pz.66# because on my transcript it says 'awarded by Pz.66#' so I had to bin the Big Pine name because no-one had any either respect of recognition at the time. Now the moment I did that my phone went off the chain, literally

¹⁴³ Deliberately using game language.

¹⁴⁴ Shortly after the research interview he was successfully headhunted by one of the biggest companies in the world.

every day, oh yeah da da da, never have I ever got such a response after changing something on my CV like that.

Looking through the LinkedIn profiles of Participants it was interesting to see the range of decisions that were made about whether to describe their degree using Pinetree (unknown new institution), the validating (well-established) university, or both, and also the extensive use of industry names met while studying. This is an example of graduates fine-tuning their digital endorsement signals.

During the data collection, Participants shared their experience of many types of digital signals: online tests, asymmetric video exercises, LinkedIn profiles, key words and search algorithms, as well as their own tactical digital signalling. Should this digital intelligence be part of a new definition of graduate-ness?

Digital screening

A crucial aspect of digital signalling relates to how these signals are interpreted and acted upon by employers (or their algorithms) in screening candidates, particularly in graduate schemes. Through the lens of signalling theory the initial online gateways discussed in Chapter 7 can be seen as a portfolio of digital signals stipulated by employers. This Participant describes what was required in relation to an online game:

Pz.18#3 (Cz.56#) they did provide the results of how you performed in each area and what they wanted you to do... each game obviously had a purpose and that was broken down and the score I got and what they were looking for.

RTS# So, when you said what they were looking for, the score they were looking for?

Pz.18# Yes, or they wanted higher in this area and lower in this area perhaps... [I got] some initial feedback almost straight away to see 'oh right, they wanted more of this and not this'.

The digital signal required here was a particular “score”.

The online tests results along with application forms, CVs, and videos are scoured (whether by humans or algorithms) for scores, key words and other criteria to generate short lists of applicants. This means employers are using a portfolio of digital signals to create a pooling equilibrium ie a pool of candidates that can proceed to the next level in the job-hunting game.

Some felt that signals filtered through technology are very limiting and do not give people a chance to demonstrate their real value, as this Participant explains after “failing” one set of online tests:

Pz.01#14 (Cz.20#) I understand – and again a company like Cz.20# probably has to be quite rigid and, not to sound sour about it because I’m not – the only thing I would say is... it doesn’t represent you... they don’t even get to understand who you are and what you can bring to the party because in all of that language, numerical, logical reasoning... at no point did I get a

chance to talk about why I'm vehement about artificial intelligence, why I loved Cz.68#¹⁴⁵ and what I wanted to do with it. ^{lxxxix}

As a result some attempted to find alternative signals or signal hacks to bypass the screening:

Pz.20#4 I remember actually when I was looking to become a research assistant at the Cz.06# I spoke to someone I'd worked within in the department and... I said... 'what are my prospects in getting a job here afterwards' and she said... 'as a typical candidate your grades might not be enough'... she said 'that is something you might be screened out on, however, if you are going for it let me know and I might be able to speak to HR about it', so it's things like that [make networking important].^{lxxxii}

But others felt the process can be more meritorious than it looks at first:

Pz.04#4 RTS# Okay, so you're thinking maybe [online testing is] not the best way of testing that then, it should be done with a phone call or something?

Pz.04# (Cz.54#) Yeah it probably should be done, but it's a filtering [thing], I think they get so many applications there are filters in place and it's just how you get through those filters and now I hire people I have a very different view of how that works because I feel like when you're there it feels like this massive wall that you're not going to go over, it's like 'got to get through these'... you've kind of got the blinkers on, whereas now I'm hiring I see actually, okay I'm looking for culture fit, I'm looking for this and this and it's just a very different experience, you see that they're not actually blocks, they're just kind of like... they're not tick box exercises, you're testing for a lot more ^{lxxxiii}

Although there was recognition of the practical necessity of sifting^{lxxxiv}, a common theme is the time consuming nature of the process^{lxxxv} and the dehumanising aspects of this experience. There was a frustration at the employers' preference for digital signals rather than meeting candidates face-to-face. Despite an awareness of the intensity of the competition there remained a common view that if only they could meet the employer face-to-face they would have a better or truer chance of success. Whether people would have felt better had they been rejected on the basis of a face-to-face interview rather than an online test seems doubtful, as at least one Participant recognised^{lxxxvi}. The fact is that rejection is difficult. This is explored in more detail in Chapter 13.

Reverse screening

One of the most interesting findings was how some candidates learnt to use digital signalling techniques to effectively turn the tables on the job-hunting process:

Pz.09#6 So yeah recruiters...I had a lot of recruiters get in touch with me probably over the last six months since changing my profile

RTS# So you're not going to them, they're coming to you?

Pz.09# Yeah they message me on LinkedIn, some recruiters are you know trying to promote jobs that are just not appropriate so there's almost a kind of filtering of...

RTS# You've got to sift

¹⁴⁵ A Cz.20# product based on Artificial Intelligence.

*Pz.09# Yeah exactly. I always think it's worth maybe a five minute quick phone call with someone if something looks interesting, partly because it's the same conversation every single time so you don't have to do anything new, you're just running them through your CV so that they can then take that CV to another company so that they can have a better understanding of you and what might be appropriate.*¹⁴⁶

It seems that digital signalling has the potential to alter the power structure in job-hunting. Certainly it is seen as very important by the Participants as is apparent in their suggestions for advising future students:

Pz.15#6 Train them on Linkedin. Everyone needs a Linkedin profile. Everyone needs to understand how Linkedin works with those key words. And some of our graduates have got jobs from that.^{lxxxvii}

Conclusion

I suggest that the rise in digital signalling could have significant repercussions for signalling theory. It means that both employers and candidates must create and learn to use a new set of signalling tools, and that through “big data” both parties may be more digitally visible and sending more signals than they realise. But it also opens some fascinating new possibilities for those with “digital intelligence”, such as students being head-hunted for roles before they have even graduated. More interestingly, and possibly alarmingly, much of the early sifting is at least partly automated through devices such as key word searches, and this means that AI¹⁴⁷ is now poised to make selection decisions. What would an intersection of AI and signalling theory look like?

The rise of digital signalling also has repercussions for the role of the university in preparing students for the world of work. This is an entirely new way of communicating, with its own subtexts and netiquette. What does this mean for the teaching of communication skills? Of what relevance is the 6000 word essay or the three-hour handwritten examination, staples of university assessment methodologies? It also provides a new way of articulating (signalling) skills and competencies. The art of bluffing well, previously reserved for the interview, is now all over the internet. To what extent are universities equipped to train students for this digital professional world? And to what extent should they?

¹⁴⁶ See the discussion on key words above and “recruiters as specialist advisers” and creating digital networks in Chapter 12 on networking.

¹⁴⁷ Artificial Intelligence.

Chapter 12 - Networking

Introduction

Networking is the third theme for discussion, and falls squarely into the second research sub-question. Networking played a significant role in the job-hunting experience of the Participants and was one of the most commonly coded themes during analysis. Networking is defined broadly as the creation and use of contacts not available to all other applicants to assist in the job-hunting experience to attempt to gain an advantage in the process. Networking could be considered a job-hunting “hack”¹⁴⁸ to use contemporary terminology – an alternative route in, often a short cut, and one that could potentially bypass other requirements. It therefore includes the use of a recruiter, which can give applicants a significant advantage,¹⁴⁹ as well as more common examples of networking.

The first section looks at the descriptive statistics of networking and the prevalence of its use by these Participants. The next section shows how networking is used, and also shows that it is not always successful. I then explore the attitudes of the Participants to fairness issues, and how networking is justified. The penultimate section looks at advice these Participants would give to other students, before concluding.

The prevalence of networking

The pervasive use of networking suggests this skill is much more directly relevant to job-hunting than any of the selection activities discussed in Chapters 6–9. Table 11 shows 53% of the Participants mentioned using networking in some form during their job-hunting. Networking was experienced by more Participants than written exercises, teamwork or assessment days. However, Table 12 shows this percentage was much higher for the research interviewees with whom the job-hunting process was discussed in detail. This is therefore likely to be a more accurate picture of the extent of networking. A remarkable 87% of the research interviewees discussed their use of networking during job applications. This suggests that networking is far more prevalent than any other activity, apart from the interview and CV/application form.

Table 13 enables us to look at networking from an application perspective. It shows that networking was used in 45% of applications (N=86), indicating that while the vast majority of Participants may have used networking at some stage, this was not in the majority of their applications.

There is a notable difference between the use rate in successful applications and those that ended in rejection. 59% of job offers featured networking, but only 22% of rejections. This suggests networking is highly effective, though not always successful.

There is also a marked difference between graduate schemes and general jobs, with networking used in 61% of the latter (N=56) but only 17% of the former (N=30). The traditional view of networking is often that it is used to access elite jobs (Tholen *et al.*,

¹⁴⁸ Deliberately using game language.

¹⁴⁹ See “recruiters and specialist advisers” below.

2013; Wilson, 2016; Montacute, 2018), but here we see it is far more important in general jobs than in graduate schemes.

The association of networking with successful applications is seen again in the breakdown of general jobs and graduate schemes. 63% of successful applications for general jobs (N=46) used networking cf 50% of rejections (N=10). The differential is even bigger in graduate schemes with 38% (N=8) of offers having used networking but only 9% of rejections (N=22), although the number of offers here (only eight) is very small.

Table 7 shows the activities used in the 46 successful general job applications. In Table 13 we see that 63% of these same applications used networking. This makes networking by far the most common activity for securing work in general jobs (apart from interviews and CVs/application forms). The next most common activity was presentations used in only 24% of such applications. Networking was over twice as important.

In summary, networking is one of the most used techniques by the Participants, more significant than any assessment activity, and strongly correlated with successful applications. It is of much less use in graduate schemes (though appears to still significantly improve one's chances), but for general jobs it is crucial. And it is in general jobs where the vast majority of graduates are employed.¹⁵⁰

How networking is used

There were two practical benefits of using networking relevant for this study. Firstly, job opportunities arose from networks, and secondly advice and guidance on the job-hunting experience was provided by the network.

Job opportunities

Headhunting

For a number of roles Participants were approached by employers in their network to apply for roles typically after some sort of internship eg Pz.15#2 (Pinetree).

They regarded this process as merit based when asked why they thought they got the job:

Pz.15#8 (Pinetree) I think that my work ethic paid off. [They] knew me from the four months that I had worked with [the] team, [the manager] knew me as a student and academically... I performed well so they knew my ability in that sense. So I just think again relationships and people... That old saying does, you know, sometimes actually work.

Others saw being approached for roles as partly merit but also partly good luck:

¹⁵⁰ Only four Participants were employed on a graduate scheme at the time of phone survey or research interview. 36 were in general jobs (two had been on graduate schemes but have moved on), five were job-hunting and three were studying. See Table 2. (Two turned down graduate scheme roles due to other offers).

Pz.22#7 you know it's often been like that for me, very strangely, it tends to come through word of mouth and I think probably a lot of the jobs I've had have, yeah I've been approached... It's great, isn't it, if that can happen. I mean my mum says to me, Anne you're so lucky, like these jobs just come to you but I think also... if I hadn't updated my LinkedIn profile... it's taught me that yeah it's always good to keep people informed about what you're doing now because that does help... yeah I haven't really had to go through any kind of lengthy interviews or difficult processes – I've been lucky!^{lxxxviii}

Finding out about roles

A number found out about roles through their network:^{lxxxix}

Pz.01#25 (Cz.49#) incidentally it was actually an advert that the career adviser here had spotted... she just said, do you know what, considering what you're looking to go into... this maybe looks like a good piece for you, 'change the world and the government'.

Cultivating a network to create opportunities

Others created opportunities for themselves by cultivating their network relationships. For some the network they built while studying lead very directly to opportunities, such as the examples discussed under internships in Chapter 8:^{xc}

Some described this happening in an organic way:

*Pz.17#8 (Cz.14# internship) I didn't have any insight or motivation, but I went for a coffee with [the lecturer] to discuss [things] and he just said three days later your name popped in my head when this guy asked if I knew anyone that wanted to do a summer placement and that turned from a summer placement into part-time [work] in my second year...*¹⁵¹

While others were a little more tactical:

Pz.02#17 So, for example, back in the first year we met... [a senior staff member] from Cz.25#. I was actually speaking to him a couple of months ago back in January... I just saw him pop up on LinkedIn so I sent him a quick message just to see how he was doing. He said that all was going well and we should catch up soon.

RTS# So why did you do that?

Pz.02# Just because he was there. Why not, why wouldn't I? And I guess, looking deeper into it, he's a, I guess, a good player to have in the market if I was looking for anything else... And I guess part of that was I got along with [him] when he was here anyway, so nice to connect.^{xc1}

Establishing digital networks

Of particular interest is the conscious building of a digital network by Participants, especially through the use of LinkedIn.¹⁵² A number learnt to carefully word their CV, skills and key words to attract a network to them. This digital signalling drew recruiters^{xcii} and employers,^{xciii} who then proposed potential jobs. Others approached recruiters directly themselves^{xciv} which also led to job application opportunities.^{xcv}

The use of digital signalling is one of the most interesting themes that emerged during analysis and is discussed in Chapter 11.

¹⁵¹ It was this specific internship that led directly to him being headhunted for his graduate role based on his key word updates on LinkedIn.

¹⁵² See LinkedIn section in Chapter 11.

Advice and guidance

General advisors

Networks also helped some Participants practice for applications and prepare for the process.^{x cvi} If the network contact is working in the industry it provides a distinct advantage:

Pz.20#5 (Cz.21#) I was in a fortunate position that I was able to speak to my existing colleagues who were able to help me with doing my presentation... I practised it with my colleagues... speaking to people who already work in that industry it's a lot easier because they know what they're looking for whereas if you're speaking to strangers who don't understand or aren't familiar with it then you're at less of an advantage, so I'm glad because it definitely helped^{x cvii}.

Recruiters as specialist advisers

Recruiters can act as particularly well-informed specialist advisers:

Pz.09#8 (Cz.15#) the recruiter actually effectively sent me the questions before the interview... obviously the recruiter talks to the candidate after the interview and says, 'oh by the way what were the questions', the candidate tells the recruiter so the recruiter can tell the next candidate who's about to go in which possibly undermines the...

RTS# It's like being told the questions in the exam to some of the students but not all [laughs]

Pz.09# Yeah... so that one was massively easy to prepare for and you know they pretty much stuck to the script.^{x cviii}

Tactical advantages

Some were quite strategic in their approach to getting help using networking "hacks":¹⁵³

Pz.09#12 (Cz.07#) I found this job description for an associate level data scientist at Cz.07# and I thought that would be cool so actually before applying I contacted someone from Cz.07# in this associate data scientist role to just kind of find out a little bit more about the role, whether he was enjoying it, that sort of thing and yeah so he got back to me and I had... a phone call with him and he was really helpful in terms of giving me tips as well for the application. And then [I] filled out the application... then got through to an HR round interview. Before I did the HR round interview I got back in touch with this guy to get some more tips. So basically at each stage I got back in touch with this guy and got some more tips. So actually that was really nice to almost have an insider...

RTS# Did you just reach out cold on LinkedIn?

Pz.09# Yeah... So I was slightly surprised when he responded but... I'd added those key words to my profile so you know it was a gleaming profile clearly worthy of a response from his perspective!

This Participant describes a specific hack he learned at Pinetree:

Pz.02#13 I found the people, I found the decision-makers for the roles and got in touch with them... if HR have a role you just go straight past HR and go straight to the hiring manager so that HR will be cut out of the process...

¹⁵³ Deliberately using game language.

He went on to explain why he does this:

Pz.02#18 I wanted to be that person that was remembered, not by HR but by the person that is actually looking to fill the role and I guess I wanted to have more interaction with them as well through the process because I think company culture was quite big for me

And how he first learnt it:

Pz.02#19 (Big Pine Australia role) they're things that I picked up from university... it was actually [one of the lecturers] that taught me the whole thing indirectly. So when I got the role or the internship with Big Pine which then turned into a role later on after the internship, [the lecturer] reached out directly to the VP of Australasia in Big Pine and then got [me] the role that way.^{xcix}

Though he did admit this approach could sometimes backfire, and alienate the HR people.

Unsuccessful networking

This brings us on to the fact that networking was not always successful.

In this instance the fact that this candidate knew everyone on the interview panel created a complacency which lost her the job offer:

Pz.11#6 (Cz.16# 2) So unfortunately I didn't get it but this is why it makes such a good story – well, in my opinion! – so they went for the external [candidate] and I was convinced they'd go with me, I know Cz.16# so well et cetera but actually they had a [manager] who sat down with me afterwards and gave me some feedback which actually... I'm going to carry with me I think. One of the first things he said was, because I knew them, I didn't sell myself as much. Because I knew who they were I didn't really tell them stories, so he said when he first met me and I told him about my experiences I told a story, I kind of made it come to life.¹⁵⁴

Despite detailed advice and guidance, this graduate simply did not get through the online test gateways:

Pz.18#9 (Cz.56#) because that was one of the first big ones I applied to, I definitely spent a lot longer on that one and what I did was I spent quite a lot of time actually with my husband's grandfather who, as part of his job before he retired was to look at CVs and creating really good CVs, and so we spent a lot of time together looking at does this make sense, how is this structured, what are you trying to communicate, what are Cz.56# looking for, okay, how can we map your experience with those areas. So I think that's also why I was quite sore about the Cz.56# one because I spent so much time on it!

This Participant describes how he had reached a high level of anxiety about the online tests required for graduate schemes, and attempted to use networking techniques in part to bypass or at least soften this requirement for one particular application. He describes in detail each attempted “hack”:

Firstly he used his dissertation to try and find a contact that could help him:

Pz.01#8 (Cz.20#) [my final dissertation] I did it on Cz.20# and I did it purposely because I wanted an 'in' with some contacts that this very connected business school often has and I

¹⁵⁴ Note the importance of articulation, discussed in Chapter 9.

was trying to use that as a vehicle... I managed to go and see one of their client directors, presented what I was thinking and she was really, really keen and said 'I think you'd thrive at Cz.20#'. So naturally I was all a bit excitable and thought, 'yeah this sounds good'.

He then tried to get his new found contact to help him with the application, but note she declined:

Pz.01#26 ...and after that I just was saying, you know 'can I please get the application in, can you help me through it', and they take a very hands off approach, started connecting me to other individuals who again just don't give you much time...

He therefore found himself part of the standard recruitment process for the graduate scheme but still tried to use the fact he had a named contact to somehow help:

Pz.01#27 So when I applied for the Cz.20# role I remember it saying... 'how did you come about this job' and I ticked off on the list 'recommended by somebody who works internally' and it said 'who's the name' so I put her name down – because again it kind of sold you the dream of you know, 'I'm here so don't you worry, it'll all be brushed under the carpet',¹⁵⁵ and then you do the psychometric test and it's an absolute car crash

When unsuccessful he returned to the contact to see if there was any other way in:

Pz.01#28 ...and then I went back and said, oh you know 'I've had this really bad result but I'd still like to be part of the firm, is there anything you can do', and they just switch off, done

RTS# What do you mean, switched off?

Pz.01# I didn't get anything from her after that

It is interesting to see how very much this did not work in comparison to the Pz.09#12 or Pz.02#13 examples above. However, note that they were not graduate schemes. The statistics given in the first section of this chapter indicate networking may be of less relevance for graduate scheme roles.

In another example the graduate cultivated her start-up network with great determination. As a result she jumped the queue for one particular job application, and started to form relationships and make plans with the employer on the basis she would be offered the job. However she then failed the technical test.^c Despite this awkward and "horrible" experience, in fact at a later date it successfully led to consultancy work:

Pz.04#5 (Cz.54#) about three or four months ago I got an email going, 'we really need a project manager immediately to do an interim role'... so I actually went back and did full circle and became project manager for them at Cz.67#.^{ci}

Attitude to fairness issues

The complexity of fairness

There was some recognition of potential unfairness in the use of networks in certain circumstances.^{cii} However most saw fairness as a complex issue, and were reluctant

¹⁵⁵ They are referring to the online tests.

to judge, perhaps because they were aware that they themselves would probably make the most of any networking opportunities they had:

Pz.17#12 [It's] Incredibly competitive... if you get to the final stage and you've gone through all of that and then you have to sort of accept that someone else has got the job over you because they have an internal connection, that's not fair. But then I also don't blame them using their networks that way and it is, the networking side is huge. If you've got someone that can sort of vie [sic] for you then you're already ahead of everyone and it doesn't matter what you've done in the past... I don't think I would be here personally if I hadn't gone for coffee for [the lecturer] to give me that first internship and it's just funny how these things just add up.^{ciii}

Proving yourself

The general view seemed to be that even where networking was used, applicants would still in the end have to prove themselves.^{civ} Many Participants implicitly saw a difference between “skipping the line”, and having a line pointed out to them. However there were a number of examples that showed applicants skipping part of the line through various networking techniques^{cv} or hoping to skip part of the process.^{cvi} Nonetheless they still had to prove themselves at some point and there were no examples of applicants bypassing the process altogether in an application for a permanent job.

However, there were clearly conflicted feelings about networking.

After a frustrating job search and a string of poor roles, this Participant decided to start deliberately pulling strings:

*Pz.21#8 so I thought I've got to do it myself and I wouldn't you know wouldn't have done that a year ago, I would have just conformed, you know I've got a 2:2 oh you know my CV's not that strong or my degree's not that strong, I'm going to have to join the queue and it's made me realise, who says I've got to join the queue, why don't I just skip to the front, that's what I'm doing so now I'm trying to pull my strings now so that I can get this job.*¹⁵⁶

Some Participants made a point of securing work on their own and not because of personal networks:

Pz.17#13 The biggest thing for me and it's not pointing the finger at anyone but you know I've come to London by myself on a whim, and with a view that I wanted to make something happen at the end of the three years and it has fortunately... no-one can take this away from me and no-one can take the job and say that so and so has done that, and that's a nice feeling, you know, it's saying that this is all because of...

RTS# You've earned it

Pz.17# Yeah exactly^{cvi}

This pride in not using their networks in the first instance shows conflicted feelings about the proper role of networking.^{cvi}

¹⁵⁶ This refers to him using his network to get an internship through which he hopes his performance will lead to a permanent job.

Family networking

Sometimes the initial job source was through family connections, though this was not common.^{cix} Where Participants mentioned family it was mostly for advice and practicing.^{cx}

When one graduate was asked about using family connections she exclaimed:

Pz.04#8 That's so unfair, there's no-one that my family connections that I would want to... I've never really been introduced to anyone that way, it's all been just getting out there and talking to people

The use of her own network which she worked hard to build was ethical, but the use of family connections was not.

However, another Participant saw no real difference between family and commercial networks:

Pz.14#7 RTS# Do you think there's a difference between like using your family network versus your commercial network?

Pz.14# Not really, no. It depends on the level maybe, I don't know, depends on like the seniority of the role, like if it's – only because I have it like in my head – I'm thinking the CEO, his niece was looking for a job and he gave her a graduate position, that's a bit different than you being hired as CEO of Cz.56# and being like, okay, I'll make my brother CMO, it's not quite the same but yeah I mean I think there's a difference, no, between commercial and family

RTS# Okay, you don't think there's a difference?

Pz.14# No

RTS# So you think the CEO who appoints his niece in a graduate job is perfectly fine?

Pz.14# I wouldn't say it's perfectly fine but I would say it's... only because she's very capable of the job... ah it's tough, isn't it..?

RTS# I mean I have no view, I'm just genuinely interested in what you think?

Pz.14# I've never really thought about it actually... I think it's okay, I mean it's fine... because if she wasn't doing the job well then something would be done about it, you know...hopefully [laughs]

In this instance fairness was considered to have been achieved because the niece had in fact proven herself in the role.¹⁵⁷

This person justifies professional networking where she used work contacts to help her apply for a role, as opposed to family contacts:

Pz.20#6 RTS# And do you think that's fair?

Pz.20# What the whole concept of 'it's who you know not what you know'? [laughs]... no I don't think it's fair but then... though I think that once you are in, in any kind of job then the onus is on you to like...you then have the opportunity to network. I just think it's in that bit before when you're still in your studies... Yeah I think if you've built your network from taking advantages from opportunities that you have in a work situation where if, you know, if you

¹⁵⁷ This is the only example of family networking being used to get a graduate scheme role, but this is hearsay and does not refer to one our Participants.

don't speak to them then you've lost that opportunity, as opposed to say even if you don't speak to them your parents might know them or someone else that you know might know them, there is a difference in those two

RTS# So it's sort of networking by merit is actually fine and is a reflection of your work

Pz.20# I would say that, yeah^{cx}

But even when family connections played a role she was reluctant to label this as unfair:

Pz.20#8 RTS# Whereas a network that someone else has given to you is kind of...

Pz.20# But it's not for me to then say that you're not allowed to use a network that happens to be already instilled in your life, ... so if I was say like an employer and I knew my colleague's son for example wanted a job, can we give him an interview, that kind of situation versus, 'oh there is an apprentice or a graduate who seems really engaged and who's already expressed an interest, she may not have experience but I've heard good things about her', in those kind of situations I think go for the one who's already in the business or who's already out of their own right gone and spoken to people, as opposed to a colleague's child^{cxii}

And in the end passes the ethical difficulties on to the employer:

Pz.20#11 I think the onus is on the employer and the recruitment people to make sure that when they are looking for candidates they are looking for people who express an interest or build a network for themselves rather than someone pulling in a favour so it's more of a top-down attitude.

This graduate was desperate to find a job so managed to secure two internships, one with each of their sisters. He saw this as proactively creating an opportunity:

Pz.21#6 so I saw a space in my sister's company, I was like 'hold on a minute, I can do your branding, it's all wrong', or 'I can do your stock-taking, right, or readjust your supplies' because the supplies were aged... they hadn't changed in three or four years, they were paying them like three grand a month more than they really should have been and the reason why they're not paying that [any more] is because of me. So I saw the space and I put myself forward and I told her I was going to do this, 'whether you need it or not I'm going to do it. If you don't want to pay me you don't have to pay me but the money you save you will be able to see the value of it'. I did that.

There is only one example of a family connection that ended in a job offer for permanent employment. Their father worked at the company and that meant they skipped the initial tests and went straight to the full assessment day. Nevertheless they did a lot of preparation^{cxiii}. Furthermore they actively sought additional information and therefore a selection advantage when an opportunity arose serendipitously to speak to employees who happened to know their father. Conflicted feelings are revealed as to whether this is cheating:

Pz.02#20 (Cz.62#) I guess I was cheating a bit. I went to a careers fair... and I saw the Cz.62# stand... so I went and I was talking to the guys and I was asking them about the whole interview process so they were letting me know like how it is. We connected on LinkedIn so... I just dropped a quick message saying that I'm going in for the interview, any tips you can give? And then they just told me like this is what it'll be like, this is what they're looking for... they

knew my dad, they had worked with him on a few projects so we began talking that way and, like I said, I am just the kind of guy who will just go up and talk to people just for the sake of it which is why even in my third year [at Pinetree] I still knew all the first years because I just talk but, yeah... they told me exactly what they were looking for there and how they got it. And you'll get a lot of people who say 'but you cheated' but no I didn't.^{cxiv} 158

Overall, despite some conflicted views, the prevailing opinion seemed to be that you can and should work on building and extending your network. It is a fundamental professional skill, and while the starting point might be serendipitous, building it is meritocratic.

Justifying networking

Participants were able to identify a number of justifications for the use of networking as part of the job-hunting process.

Networking makes it easier for employers

Some argued it is much easier for the company to work with someone they already know:

Pz.22#1 I think people like to work with people they know or they know of or they've got some experience with... because some people can interview very well... though they're not the right fit for the job but I think if you already know someone you can visualise how they're going to fit in or if they're going to get along in your company or organisation, you just know if they're going to be a fit, you get a good feeling.^{cxv}

This also indicates the weakness of signalling as a source of information on someone's work potential. The signals – via interviews, CVs etc – are a poor substitute for actually experiencing the person's work. In signalling theory, one must remember signals are a surrogate for when there is a shortage of true information. This is discussed in Chapter 14.

Networking as preparation

This Participant argued networking was simply a type of preparation, and draws a persuasive analogy with the role of a recruiter:

Pz.02#21 If someone applied directly, blindly, and I was putting someone into a process [as a recruiter], the guy that I put into the process would have a clear idea of exactly what the hiring manager is looking for because I have told him and that's not considered cheating so I don't know why this would be. If I've gone out there and done extra work just to, you know, figure out not just blindly stabbing in the dark trying to, you know, hope that I'd made an impression, then it's fair game.^{cxvi}

Networking can balance out negative signals

Interestingly, some saw networking as a chance to balance out shortcomings on their CV. In these instances applicants felt burdened with a negative signal – and that the

¹⁵⁸ In the end, though offered a permanent role they turned it down as the start date was too far away and they got another job starting earlier.

use of networking could help them get past this and give them an opportunity to prove their value:

Pz.20#9 there'll always be hoops to jump through and there'll always be screeners and if you can't get through the screeners just on the basis of what you've got in your degree you need some sort of help and actually that's something that – I know this isn't the purpose of this interview but something that Pinetree do well – is having that kind of opportunity to even though, yes, you may be studying full-time, you are exposed to businesses and people who you can build in your network who later can help you with that process, as I do think it is kind of stacked against you [poor school grades] and you're kind of stuck between a rock and a hard place... Because even if your experience falls slightly short or it is quite limited if you've got someone on the inside so to speak at a company you might want to work for in the industry that you help you with a foot through the door. ^{cxvii}

Networking as a merit-based skill

Perhaps the most common view is that networking is actually a merit-based professional skill.

This Participant used their network to create an opportunity (of a week's work experience in another department) to build relationships and demonstrate skills and explained that this was the reason they then got a job in that department:

Pz.15#15 I suppose the relationships that I built just within that week with the- the Head of the division and just... proving myself, getting involved and learning about everything that they did just my whole attitude and approach to everything.

Networking is also seen as hard work and an investment of time and energy:

Pz.04#6 it's like planting enough seeds and then something will come from it...

They then explain their success in getting project work after having done a lot of networking:

Pz.04#7 I walked into the room and I was like, I know I've got this because I've done so much legwork and I know if they need anyone again for conferences and stuff it's done, it's like creating this... personal branding... there's a lot of seeds there that there's a lot of legwork done, so there'd been a lot of energy to put in but it's now starting to build.

Policy makers and universities themselves frequently present studying for a degree as an investment (Browne, 2010; Willetts, 2015; OfS, 2019b, 2019f). Perhaps students also need to be encouraged to invest in networking.

Finally, several Participants describe networking as a core skill needed in the work place to help the business and to build your own career:

Pz.18#4 (Cz.20#) So networking is something [Cz.20#] always push, usually build your network, build your network because, yeah, it helps you as an individual but also helps the business because it gets everyone else talking, communication and finding out what other people are doing in projects that are not necessarily repeat work or reinventing the wheel but actually we are constantly reinventing ourselves as a company and as individuals^{cxviii}.

Advice to other students

The attitude to networking and its importance can also be seen in the advice Participants said they would give other students. One of their most common recommendations was to actively build your professional network while studying:

Pz.22#2 (ideas for students) networking skills, talking about how to network, how to get yourself out there in the position where you might get offered more jobs or what sort of events you would be attending, should you be joining societies or clubs if you're interested in going doing a certain route.^{cxix}

Participants saw networking as providing many important benefits specifically for students:

Networks could be a source of unexpected opportunities:

Pz.02#22 I think networking is really important, no matter what they're looking to get into. People from all aspects of life. You know, an HR manager in one particular firm that knows a hiring manager somewhere else, you know that helps but you wouldn't necessarily know that that's the case. So networking is key at any point. There is something that we have, it's not an elevator pitch but it's like you can talk to someone in an elevator and by the time you get to your floor you could have a new job.

Members of your network are often willing to help you, especially early on in your career:

Pz.07##28 And then in all your assignments, do primary research, go out and talk to people and find out things. You're in the middle of London... you find someone at LinkedIn ask them, they'll definitely respond to you, that's pretty much what I did my whole way through and you build up this amazing network of people and it's like a good thing to have an excuse to talk to those kind of people and they're so willing to help you and you don't often get that later on in life because they kind of see you as their equal whereas [as a student]... you almost use that 'I don't know anything' to your advantage^{cxx}.

Networking can play a role in broadening your education, whether it is opening up your mind to new possibilities:

Pz.04#10 [networking] actually probably expanded my horizons... so I was doing my dissertation on the internet of things and I kind of [discovered] the London tech scene and there was so much there, it's probably the best in the world in terms of meetups and people and specialisations and just yeah everyone is just so amazing and engaged and so I started going to the conferences... like there's loads and loads of free events... there were so many going on.^{159 cxxi}

Or helping you to meet a wide range of people:

Pz.03#4 [students] don't know where to start, don't know where to look, not really sure also about the opportunities out there, the breadth of opportunities because you're mainly just exposed to your own circle of friends and... family^{cxxii}

¹⁵⁹ This networking experience meant she changed her aim of becoming an accountant to becoming an entrepreneur.

Finally, networking can also play an important role in humanising the job-hunting process, which is important given the emotional challenges many Participants faced in respect of this.¹⁶⁰

Networking can humanise both the company:

Pz.04#11 the thought of a job ad just really turns me off. It's just so beige and it's like it's not a company, a company is people, it's not a document. It's not an A4 piece of paper saying you should have these skills... there is a lot more to it... I didn't want to pigeon hole myself... because there is so much more to play around with and there are different ways. I think it's what I've already learned that there are many different ways of making money.

And the applicant:

Pz.02#23 So I think ultimately if you were hiring for a role and you don't really know who's in HR and they came to you with a CV and said, look I've got this person, all you're seeing is black and white writing on a piece of paper but if that was my CV and you had some interaction with me as well at least, you know, you might be able to visualise what's on that piece of paper.

For some Participants networking is seen as more “real” than a more formal approach to job selection, allowing both companies and applicants to inject their personalities into the process and move away from CVs, application forms and test results.

¹⁶⁰ See Chapter 13

Conclusion

In short, networking in all its various formats, was a key skill used in a high percentage of successful applications. It appears to have less of a role to play in graduate schemes, but is very relevant for general jobs where the vast majority of graduates are employed. Although there were some conflicting feelings on whether it is always fair, overall the Participants articulated a robust defence of the use of networking and its construction as a professional skill. I suggest that that the importance of not just face-to-face but also digital networking will only grow with the emerging phenomenon of digital signalling discussed in Chapter 11.¹⁶¹

This chapter concludes the findings on the selection activities the Participants experienced in their post-graduation transition to work. In Chapters 7 and 8 we looked at the assessment activities set by the employers, which specifically test the skills of applicants. In Chapter 9 we looked at the traditional approach of the interview, in which applicants generally have to articulate the presence of skills. Chapters 10, 11 and 12 focused on other activities undertaken by the Participants that were not necessarily set by employers but were still part of the job-hunting experience. This covered indirect signalling, digital signalling, and networking.

The next chapter moves away from selection activities to focus on the emotional experience of these Participants.

¹⁶¹ Yet curiously, networking as such is rarely mentioned in the any of the employer surveys of desirable skills reviewed for this thesis.

Chapter 13 - The Emotional Landscape

Introduction

I have now reached the final chapter on the findings of this thesis. So far in Chapters 6–9 we have looked at the activities specifically required by employers, the proof-points that graduates must navigate successfully in order to get a job offer. In Chapters 10–12 we looked at the more pervasive themes of indirect signalling, digital signalling and networking. The latter could also be regarded as activities used by Participants in the attempt to secure work, though not necessarily prescribed by employers as such. In this chapter we take a very different perspective and rather than focusing on activities, we turn to emotions. The emotional landscape is an important aspect of early-in-career job-hunting and relevant to understanding how the transition was experienced by the Participants.

I have already included numerous references to feelings in the previous chapters, as can be seen in many of the quotes, and the specific sections on “the viewpoint of the Participants” in Chapters 7 and 8. In this chapter we take a step back to look at the overall job-hunting process and some of the more difficult emotions experienced by Participants. One of the dominant themes found during analysis was what I have termed the dehumanising aspects of the university-to-work transition, by which I mean the feeling of not being recognised as an individual person of value. Many expressed a strong desire to be recognised as an individual, but felt they were often reduced to a number.¹⁶² Given how competitive job-hunting can be, and that this was well recognised by the Participants, it is perhaps surprising to hear just how difficult the experience was at times for many applicants.

That is not to say there were not many positive experiences. Participants spoke favourably of particular applications, often thought them fair and appropriate, and there was an understanding of the difficulty facing employers of having to sift large numbers of candidates.^{cxxiii} Not surprisingly they often thought the process was positive when they were successful in getting an offer,^{cxxiv} but also where what was tested was of relevance to the job (even when very rigorous)^{cxxv} or when they received feedback.^{cxxvi} They were less positive when the selection activities were seemingly irrelevant to the job,^{cxxvii} or when they felt they had no chance to truly demonstrate who they were,^{cxxviii} or when they were ignored.^{cxxix} Nor did they appreciate the time consuming nature of many applications.^{cxxx} Some indicated it got less painful as they got used to it, and once they had a job offer some could look back on a string of rejections with a philosophical view.¹⁶³

¹⁶² Discussed below under “Merely a number”.

¹⁶³ See the section on “The Pain of Rejection” below.

Listening to these graduates it was clear that resilience and self-confidence is very important. In navigating the transition they need to be able to take rejection, confront failure, manage the unexpected, and cope with not getting clear up-front instructions nor receiving feedback afterwards, nor even being acknowledged in many cases. Note this is the exact opposite of what is expected in the student learning experience and raises challenging questions about the design of degree study.

The first section of this chapter describes the pain the Participants felt on being rejected, including those with special characteristics. The second section looks at the emotional impact of being treated as a number, and their strong desire to be treated as an individual. The next section on “the box-fitting game”¹⁶⁴ describes how even face-to-face interviews can be dehumanising. The final section shares advice for students and companies. These are not presented as proposals for change, so much as further insights into how the Participants felt about some of the aspects of the job-hunting experience.

The pain of rejection

One striking finding was simply the level of pain felt by many of the applicants at various stages in the job-hunting process. Perhaps this might sound naive or even ridiculous given the inevitably competitive nature of finding work, but nonetheless the pain was very real as can be seen from these examples:

This one describes their distress on one particular application in detail:

Pz.10#2 (Cz.48#) I was upset because I don't mind being rejected, I want to know why I was rejected and I couldn't even get in touch with them to ask why... I had questions, what had I done wrong, what could I have done better, is there anything else I could have applied to... but I think I was naïve as well at the time because it was like why would a company that big reply to me as well... I felt like the application process was also harsh. I felt like you had to be the crème de la crème.

This Participant had only applied for a very small number of applications but they loomed large in their mind so this example represents more emotional investment than one might expect or perhaps consider wise. This dissertation is about revealing the lived experience of these graduates in transitioning to work, whatever it may be. It seems that some are not experienced enough yet to be wise, and that their professional identities can be fragile.

This Participant had to cope with moving from being an outstanding student to experiencing multiple failures, as well as being outright ignored:

Pz.01#29 So six didn't even acknowledge my existence... three I had brute force hard psychometric testing, online testing, didn't pass them, they were nasty, so I didn't even get through that stage, and then Cz.49# was the one I went all the way through and even managed to get to speak to somebody

¹⁶⁴ Deliberately using game language.

This Participant explained how their disappointment was increased because of how much work they put into applications:

Pz.04#12 (Cz.10#) It still really hurt because... I'd put a lot in... I think I do go very much full in... that's my approach to things... There was a few of these and they were very much like I'd focus on one at a time, like three or four really good applications where I'd really found great start-ups or small businesses that I wanted to work for, put a lot behind it, got really close like this and then it didn't work out and I think that started to go...very emotionally draining

This raises the issue of signalling cost in demonstrating commitment for a particular role and for a particular organisation. Dedication (even if manufactured) is a required signal as found in Chapter 9. Yet it is also clear that the investment of time and emotion only makes it more painful when not successful^{cxxxi}. And it is unsuccessful in most cases. This is therefore an expensive signal for applicants to send.

Some had to cope with a slow and uncertain rejection which was particularly difficult:

Pz.21#7 RTS# So they never actually told you, you had to actually contact them to find out?

Pz.21# (Cz.44#) I got an email instantly saying, 'oh we'll process you're contact request, someone in the team will get back to you soon', all right... honestly I wanted to destroy my laptop, I was like 'are you serious I spent that hundred and fifty pounds up in Leicester, I wasted that whole day doing shitty ice breaking challenges, put everything into that for you to not even give me a definite answer'... it's not like I was sure I was going to get it, it's just tell me straight away that you're not going to get it, let me know, don't try and ease me down all right and I got a few other responses like, 'unfortunately you were like in line for it' – this is a different company, – 'oh, unfortunately we had one person that'... I don't want to know that there was one person that had beaten me, just tell me I was part of the hundred that didn't get through, right because that's just going to hurt me even more and honestly that stuck with me because I was so wired up at just the whole process of it all.'^{cxxxii}

Bearing in mind that on average the Participants were rejected over 90% of the time, it is not surprising that some became highly anxious about ever getting a role as can be seen in these two examples:

Pz.01#10 (Cz.20#) I can remember calling my mum and saying, oh how am I ever going to get a job because for all the knowledge and my First class degree and my paper that's done this, that and the other,¹⁶⁵ I can just never get past these flippin' tests! Hateful things.

Yet in the end they were happy with having secured one job out of ten applications which they saw (correctly) as “beating the odds”.^{cxxxiii}

Pz.11#7 (Cz.09#) I was so upset about it because it was such a cool agency and it was working with different brands and I remember... messaging [a colleague] saying, 'oh my god, I don't know what to do, I haven't got it!'... I think at that point I just kind of thought this is all I've got [laughs] the only opportunity I've got.

Yet despite this anxiety they also turned down a job opportunity that was not “cool” enough.

¹⁶⁵ His final dissertation was published in a journal and presented at an international conference.

This Participant failed to get through the online tests in numerous applications, and was only successful when they got the chance to build an individual relationship first:

Pz.01#30 (Cz.49#) I definitely liked the fact that it was a telephone conversation first because I just felt, oh at least it gives me that opportunity to get across to them that I'm keen and ambitious and that I love [technology], in the hope that yes they might be a little more understanding if the online assessment's a bit trashy

This quote captures well the contrast between the depersonalised online tests and the chance to speak to a human and express oneself as an individual. It was a common view that if somehow the applicant could meet people on a one-to-one basis, they would be able to put across their personality and be more fairly judged.¹⁶⁶ However, this is not necessarily correct. We have already seen in the discussion on interviews in Chapter 9 that a one-to-one with a human being is not necessarily a humanising experience. This is further evidenced in “the box-fitting game”¹⁶⁷ below.

Nonetheless, in this particular example, the order of interview followed by tests worked well for Pz.01#, but they acknowledge that this might not always be the case:

Pz.01#9 (Cz.49#) but at the same time I could imagine if you'd had a really smoking hot good telephone conversation and then you failed on an online test, which I know does happen... yeah that would probably hurt a little more then...

RTS# Because it's more personal?

Pz.01# Yeah... you've built a connection... you don't feel quite as much a number by that stage, you know you've had communication, it feels like the door's a little more open and then an online test smacks you down which is completely in the opposite way.

And that is exactly what happened with this next Participant who found the networking they had done which got them into the community and through the initial interviews very quickly, was not enough to get the job offer, as they later failed the technical test. This application would have been less painful had it been the other way around:

Pz.04#9 (Cz.54#) I applied for a job with them as well, that was very painful when I didn't get that one because I went a little bit too high too quickly... that was quite a horrible application because I got so far really quick... like I knew the right people, I was starting to make friends [and plans]... yeah so it was quite a difficult one that

In short, and unsurprisingly, rejection was a difficult but inevitable part of the job-hunting process for the majority of Participants. In the end, some were able to treat it as a (painful) life lesson:

Pz.07##29 [So I've really got used to] ...getting rejected. And that is a fantastic skill to learn. It's so good because you can go through your whole life being good at everything... but you haven't really seen the world yet, so you can get really good grades but it's not so reflecting of how life is. I think you get very disheartened at the first few rejections whereas I'm actually, 'this is quite good like mental learning for how to deal with rejection'... cxxxiv

¹⁶⁶ See the section on “Fitting in” in Chapter 9.

¹⁶⁷ Deliberately using game language.

Opting out

Frequent rejection was not inevitable, however. A number of Participants managed to avoid the possibility of numerous or even any rejections^{cxxxv}. Various techniques precluded en masse rejections, and are set out below.

Those that secured permanent work through internships applied for very few if any jobs, and were glad that they could avoid the intense competitive landscape of graduate job-hunting:

Pz.03#9 (Cz.24#) I must admit I was quite happy that it worked out that way because I was a little bit anxious about... the stress of going to interviews and all the other rounds you have to go through.^{cxxxvi}

Others used recruiters to help them source jobs and prepare them for interviews^{cxxxvii} or used networking or digital signalling techniques discussed in Chapters 10 and 11.

This one simply settled for the first graduate scheme she secured:

Pz.18#5 I could have applied to more places, I feel. I know a lot of people applied to a lot of places and got through to some rounds and got rejections whatever. In my mind I felt as soon as I got an offer, and as long as I was happy with that offer, I was just going to go for it rather than keeping waiting and keep applying.

During the research interview, an older Participant reflected on their lack of proactivity in job-hunting, and their approach of waiting for opportunities to come to them. They considered that the inevitable compromises others had to make meant their technique was justifiable:

Pz.22#8 not everyone gets their ideal job, even people that are out there being very proactive and searching for jobs, a lot of them are compromising a lot anyway on, you know on the jobs they're going for or the jobs they're accepting so I think me being not so proactive and taking what comes my way is probably not such a terrible thing.

Others retreated from the fight:

Pz.15# applied for only one graduate scheme, found it “*the most horrific experience of my entire life*” and one that “*doesn't show your work ethic or what you're like as a person*”.^{cxxxviii} They explained how they developed the technique of relationship building instead.^{cxxxix} They saw this as more meritocratic than the dehumanising experience of graduate applications. They applied for two roles using their own technique (both successful^{cxl}) and no other jobs.

While this undoubtedly decreased the possibility of rejection, one cannot help but feel that they found a single negative experience so painful they immediately retired from the fray, to remain in a safer environment of people they already knew.^{cxli} One cannot help but wonder whether remaining in a safe haven of reduced competitiveness is a good idea. Could it compromise the development of a resilient professional identity?

Special characteristics

The emotional response to the challenges of job-hunting was perhaps even greater for those who felt they were at a particular disadvantage:

This Participant suffered from physical disabilities that precluded them from travel or long hours and therefore from applying for very many positions. Here they describe their initial excitement at applying for a global blue chip:

Pz.10#3 (Cz.20#) I felt very excited at the beginning. I think for me I came out of university not really expecting to get a job straight away. I have a very realistic mindset and I was very interested in [this] job. It sounded interesting, it sounded very creative actually.

And later their frustration at their individual needs not being considered:

Pz.10#4 RTS# what do you think was key in missing out on this job...?

Pz.10# I feel like it was travel and I do feel like it was possibly when I mentioned my disability. I know... we did have the Disability Protection [sic] Act but I found it a lot harder than it should have been. When I explained to them that I wasn't the healthiest and I couldn't do extremely long hours... I think they should have been more understanding, to be honest ...

And thought that a face-to-face experience could have made all the difference:

Pz.10#8 (Cz.20#) I feel if I would have progressed to a face-to-face maybe, I don't know, but maybe it would have secured me a place or maybe not of the graduate job but maybe a different job. Just because someone isn't suited to one job doesn't mean they're not suited to another.

They summed up their view in this simple but moving sentence:

Pz.10#9 (Cz.20#) I always got that feeling that they wanted you to be someone that hasn't got these problems essentially.

The anger and hurt of this next Participant who had suffered from mental health issues was very apparent, and yet even so they pointed out that there was a potential logic in companies declining to hire someone like them:

Pz.21#9 a company doesn't want to hire somebody who's having a hard life, as bad as that sounds, trust me big corporates don't want anything to do with someone who's having mental issues. Although they say 'we hire everyone' that's bullshit, right, bullshit because working with board level people, having board members in my family, bullshit, right. If you're having mental issues and you've got someone who's a lot more happy in the company we don't want someone who's always coming in with a drugged smile... because we feel like that's going to rub off of people. I've done some recruiting myself, right, I try and disregard that stuff but you have to start thinking about HR things like behavioural issues and how that one person, a bad fruit, can affect the whole bunch, right.¹⁶⁸

It is not just having "protected characteristics" that can make the process extra difficult. It can also be a question of personality.

¹⁶⁸ One of the phone surveys (Pz.35#) said her age had been commented on in interviews and seemed to be a barrier.

This one describes their impression of other applicants that were rejected at their (successful) assessment day because of personality traits:

Pz.16#3 (Cz.61#) ...so shy...one was I guess... so I have perceptions of them, I think one was quite... trying to put it in a business term but quite needy, wouldn't really be a self-starter but needed lots of kind of encouragement and kind of show them exactly what they needed to do throughout and yeah one was a car salesman type of person was the impression, almost a bit of a geezer... so yeah that's quite subjective and you can't really train that out of somebody I guess

This one struggled with being painfully shy, a self-confessed introvert:

Pz.13#8 RTS# So what did you think was the key reason why you didn't get through to that next round?

Pz.13# (Cz.50#) I feel it may be my communication. I've been rusty with it for a lot of years. That's what I feel was probably the main cause.

RTS# What do you mean by that, you being rusty with it?

Pz.13# So I never really speak much so when it does come to speaking, like now, it's a bit difficult to form a sentence. I know what I want to say but gaps appeared so I think that might have been a bit of an issue

RTS# That's very interesting, thank you for sharing that.

The nature of many application processes possibly makes it harder for people of a quieter disposition to be successful (Brown, Hesketh and Williams, 2004; Tymon, 2013). According to Brown (2004) and Tymon (2013), most employers are after a particular personality type being the "proactive go-getter". The importance of confidence was a common theme in many of the research interviews.¹⁶⁹

Pz.13# went on to say that in their view individual face-to-face interviews would help applicants like them:

Pz.13#9 (Cz.50#) I feel if it was a one-one-one, face-to-face I could have explained myself better and actually brought my character across. So I do wish they had done one-to-one interviews as well

They were keen to explain that this was not simply about helping someone who is shy, but that focusing on more confident outspoken people could be a mistake for the company:

Pz.13#10 I mean [in] different situations people [behave] very differently I think and... you've got to weight[sic] it all a bit together. Someone could be very cocky and loud-mouthed and you think this guy's very... when they're in an office environment they might become a problem, so I think it's looking deeper into everything.

¹⁶⁹ 19/23 research interviewees mentioned confidence.

Apart from shyness, simply being somewhat quirky can cause anxiety about not behaving as expected, and therefore not being seen to fit in, as described in the Sellotape episode of Pz.01#11 (Cz.49#). In that instance they “got away with it” and went on to get a job offer. In fact they were proud of their individuality, as were many of the Participants. But they saw expressing their true self as a risk in the world of graduate job-hunting^{cxlii}.

They may be right given the following descriptions of other successful applicants:

Pz.07##17 (Cz.60#) I think they're from similar kind of middle class, a bit like how Cz.43# do as well, it's just so standard. If you had any pizzazz about you they'd weed you out in the first stage

Pz.16#4 (Cz.61#) Yeah, the three of us that were hired were quite similar, similar age, similar kind of interests and yeah ^{cxliii}

It follows from this that there could be an impact on diversity of both characteristics and personalities in the job selection process as was seen in this interchange:

Pz.07##18 (Cz.43#) I definitely think... that they've hired fifteen people who are pretty much carbon copies of each other, we are literally all the same.

RTS# Really? But they said they'd never seen anyone like you?

Pz.07## Yeah, but when you come into work you get people who are polite, who are competent, who have come from quite a similar background and, I don't know, you just don't see anyone with any sort of difference.

RTS# Fascinating. So are you one of the fifteen? Or do you think that you're different?

Pz.07## Of course I'm different! [laughs] I think in some ways I'm similar to them, in other ways I feel like I have more confidence to do things that they won't do, I don't know, like they're a bit cautious... Definitely I'm more like ballsy but in terms of quite well spoken and that kind of thing I think actually we are all quite similar. I do think they maybe haven't given people a chance who are a bit different, like there's nobody with accents, there's nobody who is like from a different ethnicity, nobody with disabilities, that's something that's not very diverse. Everyone's got a degree, obviously as it's a graduate scheme but nobody had done anything other than kind of going to a standard university and doing a course which they thought was useful which then they haven't used. So in that way it's like you're all the same. ^{cxliv}

Like most of the Participants, they are proud of her own individuality. And in this instance they managed to successfully walk that line between joining the carbon copies while still retaining a strong and confident sense of their unique self. But it is a difficult balancing act, and resonates with the willing compliance versus USP discussion in Chapter 10 on indirect signalling.

It also raises deeply serious questions about the proper role of the university. Even in the pursuit of outstanding employment outcomes, should the purpose of university in any way be to encourage a monoculture of corporate approved personalities? Remember the example of the Cz.57# careers advisor who encouraged elite applicants to wear the right coloured tie^{cxlv}. Should universities even attempt to

educate students to “fit in” in this way? How does that sit alongside the need to develop critical thinkers (QAA, 2014)?

Merely a number

As can be seen from most of the quotes given above, Participants often found it difficult when they felt they were not being treated as an individual. The experience could be quite dehumanising, with the feeling that they had been reduced to a number.

This feeling related especially to many of the graduate schemes:

Pz.05#8 my initial thoughts were trying to get onto a graduate scheme, because that's what everyone was doing, the salaries were also very good with those, and also with great companies, and then I think I quickly realised after that, that that probably wasn't the route for me... Because, I, it didn't make me feel very good applying for those kind of roles because it did feel like I was just a number... and I just thought if that is what the application process is like for these roles in these big companies that's probably how you're gonna feel when you're there as well. I think application processes are quite telling of what the culture is like at the company.

Pz.12#7 at the time when people were applying for graduate roles... I remember not kind of feeling like I was in full agreement of them... it felt like going to a company being amongst in some instances hundreds maybe thousands... I think the pressure of kind of almost competing for positions, I thought was not necessarily the most productive way of figuring out whether you like a company^{cxlvi}

Pz.14#13 (Cz.46#) they don't feel very human, you know. You apply to other jobs and it feels more like, okay someone's actually going to read this, like especially on LinkedIn, sometimes the job posting will have the actual person who is looking after it and they've got like a name and a photo and a job title and you're like okay, you can see exactly who this is going to, whereas a grad scheme kind of seems like you're applying to a robot who is then going to like just automatically discard you or accept you based on what you've put in...

It is possible, of course, to have graduate schemes that are personal:

Pz.16#5 (Cz.61#) I liked the process... All my emails went through a lady called [colleague] and [she] was always available for me to email and ask questions to so I got quite a personal feel from it and felt that the company came across quite well... and it was nice that everybody kind of showed an interest and wanted to get to know you... so very positive from that process

Here we see three Participants comparing experiences, and the importance to them of human contact and feeling that an employer is genuinely interested in the applicant:

Pz.05#14 (Cz.30# – graduate scheme) I think through a lot of... the graduate assessment routes it made me feel like I was just a number, and it was a case of them finding your weaknesses rather than finding what you were good at so that they could just give you a no. It did feel like that a lot.¹⁷⁰

Contrasted to this experience:

¹⁷⁰ This resonates with Brown's (2004) ideas on the 'discourse of rejection'

Pz.05#15 (the Cz.53# – general job) she just made me feel very at ease, she asked me questions about what I was doing that weekend, things like that, and just made it quite a nice experience... She also had such good reactions to everything I was saying as well, so she seemed very interested in everything I was saying and we'd have a conversation about things rather than just her listening to my answer and then carrying onto the next question.

Pz.09#10 (Cz.07# – general job) Some interviews you go to and it's the first time they're looking at your CV, some interviews like this one I went to, you know, he'd clearly studied me and knew exactly what he wanted to ask which was actually to be honest nice because I wasn't repeating the same stuff and it was like talking to someone who was actually interested in me.

Pz.10#5 (Cz.48#- graduate scheme) I'm a perfectionist so I wasn't just going to do it to standard, I wanted it to be great but I don't know if it was great, to be honest, but I just remember being really upset because I didn't even get a reply.

Contrast this with the same Participant and a different employer:

Pz.10#7 (Pinetree – general job) I loved the process. I loved the process because it was face-to-face straight away, because I was asked about how I felt about the job because when I said I'm not necessarily able to come in every day they took that into consideration, they didn't say no straight away. It helped that it was a very relaxed kind of informal interview but it was still semi-structured^{Cxlvii}.

After experiencing a number of unsuccessful graduate scheme applications this Participant explains how they felt when they decided to use his personal contacts to successfully secure an opportunity:

Pz.21#13 (Cz.18# – general job) It was almost a relief that someone's kind of accepting my personal kind of attributes and my characteristics rather than what I've written on a piece of paper, right, than what a CV and cover letter can show.

And they continued to work on the bonding even once he had an internship offer:

Pz.21#11 (Cz.18#) you know before the internship I went and had dinner with her a couple of times, right

RTS# After she made the job offer?

Pz.21# After that yeah just because I felt that I wanted to create more of a rapport with her before I went into that business just to know that I'm on the right track or I don't turn up to work wearing a sharp suit...

Interestingly, the dehumanising effect was not limited to being rejected. It could also apply to low quality jobs where applicants were successful – but only as a type of employment cannon fodder:

At first an initial phone call from the employer seemed very positive:

Pz.21#14 (Cz.03# – general job) when I applied I got called straight away, they said 'yeah come in', the lady on the phone was like 'oh so I saw you did this [social enterprise project], great that must have been amazing', and we're talking about and I'm thinking like she actually appreciates what I've done.

But the tone changed when he went for an interview:

Pz.21#15 (Cz.03#) I've gone in and I've waited around, did an interview and it was that quick... and she's just sitting there like she doesn't want to know anything about me

And then he was offered the job but soon realised everyone was:

Pz.21#16 on the Monday I saw every single one. It was like, 'oh congratulations, you got a job', but then I suddenly realised what's going on, every week they have fifteen to twenty people in there.

RTS# Oh yeah, they give the job to everybody, is what you're saying

Pz.21# Yeah, anyone who turns up, yeah. So they advertise that as a graduate role whereas the guy next to me had just finished A-levels, there was a girl next to me who had just finished her GCSEs¹⁷¹

I suggest that this kind of painful experience is more likely to happen to those struggling to find work, and therefore already probably experiencing a greater number of rejections.

Finally, note the quotes from Pz.12#7 and Pz.05#8 above on their expectation that the de-personalised recruitment process of graduate schemes would be reflected in the corporate culture. This was the reason given in both cases as to why they did not pursue such schemes. They felt, rightly or wrongly, that even if successful they would still be reduced to a number¹⁷².

The box fitting game

In addition to fitting in to the corporate culture discussed in Chapters 9-10, it was also necessary to fit into the boxes (literally) of standardised questions asked in interviews and on application forms. This was another dehumanising aspect of the transition experience, even when part of a face-to-face interview. "Box-fitting" was often perceived by the Participants as a lack of interest in the applicant, and prevented the formation of a personal bond. Many of the Participants tried to find ways to move out of the boxes to establish a connection and make their own individuality visible.

Here is a typical comment:

Pz.05#9 (Cz.30#) I just remember thinking the person on the end of the phone was doing a lot of interviews that day for a lot of people and they basically had a sheet with questions and they wanted you to just answer the questions and be done with it.

This Participant explains how one particular application was literally a box ticking exercise:

Pz.07##30 (Cz.60#) I didn't feel it worked as well for me as it was very rigid and it was very black and white, you could see them grading... I don't like interviews where you can see them ticking different boxes and things, so I think it was just too rigid and it didn't allow for any sort of conversation that was away from their answers, which I think is what made me get through

¹⁷¹ He left after three days.

¹⁷² This resonates with Lauder's (Lauder *et al.*, 2012) research that suggests that in the future only a small percentage of employees will be given "permission to think", and the rest will have to comply with central processes.

the other ones; I actually had an interest in the work whereas this was tick, tick, tick, mark, mark, mark, done.

They contrast it with how they felt about another application where they had dinner with employees and other applicants the night before the assessment day:

Pz.07##31 (Cz.17#) So I thought that was good because it kind of shows they're actually interested in you and it's not so set in stone. I'm really not a fan of interviews which are very black and white and they write down your answers and judge you on that; they should judge you on how you are as a person.

This is an interesting quote as it suggests people should be judged for their character rather than their skills – assuming the boxes are an attempt to capture skills. Yet one could easily make the argument that people should be judged for their skills and not their personality. Nonetheless in this case study there was a common view that employers should look behind the tests and the standardised interview questions and at the person as an individual.

This one explains why they prefer to go off piste:

Pz.09#11 I like an interview that goes off script, I think it shows that actually there's something interesting to talk about and that for me is like one of the flags that says 'yeah I like these people' and I like, you know, what they do and they seem to be interested in what I'm doing.^{cxlvi}

And this one how they deliberately try to ensure this will happen:

Pz.02#10 I'll actively try and make more small talk with whoever I'm interviewing with just to ease up the conversation and essentially act as an icebreaker so when we actually get to the interview it works more as a free-flowing conversation rather than question and answer which, you know, is what I prefer and is what I would like when I was interviewing people. When I do interview people what I prefer [is] people that I really... actually like. So people in some sense that you can say, 'yeah I really got along with that person, I can see myself working with them', then you're in for a good chance.¹⁷³

Overall, the combination of online tests and application forms, the use of algorithms, the inability to easily speak to people, the asymmetric video exercises, the multiple rejections, and even some of the interviews all contributed to creating a dehumanisation of the job-hunting experience that could be difficult to cope with at times.

Finally, there were also a number of Participants who thought that these depersonalised methods were simply not the best way of assessing people:

Pz.01#16 (Cz.20#) there is something more to a person behind those assessments, far more, and they could miss out on you know, big potential.^{cxlix cl}

¹⁷³ Another example of the Goldilocks game.

Advice to others

Advice for students

The desire to be treated as an individual was also apparent in responses about how to help other students. Several recommended sitting down with students to create their own unique pathway to the professional world:

Pz.02#24 I would have to talk to them all individually to begin with. Before I could figure out what job they would want, I would need to figure out what they want.^{cli}

Pz.12#1 I would definitely arrange meetings with them where I sit with them on a regular basis maybe, every few weeks and discuss what they enjoy, where they see themselves, [the] kind of experiences they've [had] that have been positive, those that have been negative and see everything as a learning experience. I would then say, take some time to think about their purpose, because I think having a purpose is really important.^{clii}

This reflects one of the themes that emerged in the analysis; that graduates have choices about their career and the companies they work for, and should focus on what interests them. This ideal sits awkwardly with the competitive nature of graduate employment. This one tries to match this ideal with pragmatism:

Pz.18#6 (advice) I would want to sit down with each of them individually to understand if they have an idea what they want to do when they finish uni, what are their strengths, what are their weaknesses, what do they want to look at, what are their areas of interest. Because they always say do a degree that you're going to love doing but – yes, I agree with that to an extent – but also... you need a job.

Ideas for companies

Finally some shared reflections on how the recruitment process might be changed to give more applicants a chance to display their individual value.

This one suggested it might be better to have more, albeit shorter, interviews, even it meant only a sample went through, rather than a larger number considered in an impersonal way:

Pz.08#10 I suppose graduate schemes they get thousands of applications and I suppose it's the only way they can vet them properly. I think the beginning stage is a bit impersonal so... I think it's just better to... review some CVs, a sample, and just interview those people even if it's just for fifteen minutes rather than have a video recording in their bedroom.

By contrast this one felt that more people should be allowed through more rounds so they had a better opportunity to demonstrate their value in different ways:

Pz.03#5 (Cz.26#) I don't know how many people they actually interview so if they can increase that somehow. I imagine that a lot of these companies also outsource these applications to another company... so maybe there is more resource [they] can put in so at least there's more people going to interview so there's less people falling out at an early stage.

This one preferred the highly inclusive approach of one of their applications where there were no CV checks or minimum requirements (not even a degree). Instead anyone could send in a sample piece of work and if it was good enough you went through to an assessment day:

Pz.13#11 (Cz.31#) there are so many people that have talents that would fit into any role but they just haven't had the opportunity... just basically opening the door to everyone to actually show you know what you're doing is actually a great way to do things. It opens the door for a lot of people. I mean, there's more competition for me but it's more fair I think.

This approach could have serious consequences for the graduate premium!

This one went even further and thought people should be given a “test run” rather than sifted out:

Pz.10#6 I think my main thing about looking for a job would be I want that connection with someone, that physical connection rather than just over email

RTS# A lot of the time that's all you get for a few rounds

Pz.10# I find that very upsetting because just because a person isn't necessarily good at email or filling out an application doesn't mean they're not suited to the job. I feel that why not give them a chance and then put them on a temporary contract for four weeks and say 'show me what you can do'. If not, maybe that person is suited to a different department and if they're not then they've had that four weeks they've learned.^{cliii}

This one explained that their passion for technology and AI found no opportunity to express itself in standard selection methods, and suggested that AI itself might be able to assist in allowing this expression:

Pz.01#15 (Cz.20#) [the process] doesn't allow for any of that [expression of passion] and maybe when you're dealing with their application numbers they just simply can't afford to but I would encourage any of them to try and understand, especially when they've got a big AI program that can understand words, if it's screening those... personal statements, [it's their passion] that I want to hear.

What is common to all these quotes is the wish for people to be treated on a more individual basis. For the latter four there is an implicit belief that people have value that may not be revealed in the current selection processes, and a wider range of approaches that enable a wider range of applicants to demonstrate value should be developed. Effectively this is an argument for a new set of acceptable signals in graduate recruitment and selection. This could have an impact on widening participation, diversity and inclusiveness.

These are not necessarily very practical suggestions. They are not included here as proposals for change. They are included because this is the perspective of these graduates. The suggestions do not pay much attention to resources. They do not address the need for employers to create processes that look objective¹⁷⁴ or that attempt to map selection decisions to corporate needs. They do not address the issues of bias around interviews. They do not address the practicalities of sifting nor

¹⁷⁴ Necessary for the 'discourse of rejection' to work (Brown, Hesketh and Williams, 2004).

the impact on the graduate premium if more roles were opened out to everyone. Above all they do not address demand-side job shortages and that graduate job-hunting operates as a Zero Sum Game. This latter point is crucial and will be explored in the Chapter 14.

Conclusion

In summary, the emotional difficulty of navigating the transition to work was a key finding in this case study. This raises numerous questions.

Are these graduates simply too sensitive? Is this just an example of the “snowflake” generation¹⁷⁵? Or has the selection process become increasingly tough?¹⁷⁶ Are we in a selection methods arms race as foretold in the Global Auction (Brown, Lauder and Ashton, 2011)? If so is it perhaps natural that many new graduates find it deeply challenging as they take their first steps in shaping their professional identity? One cannot help but be curious as to how more experienced employees and CEOs would feel if they faced the same process.¹⁷⁷ How can or should a university help students prepare emotionally for the transition to work?

Is the emotional investment required by the modern process reasonable and valid? For example, employers are looking for applicants who can show a genuine dedication to the company. But are they actually encouraging a lack of authenticity as applicants learn to play the game and signal to win? Is this “faux dedication” simply creating an increasingly expensive signal we expect recent graduates to be willing to pay? And what does it actually test?

What impact do these approaches have on diversity? Not just diversity of race, ability and other characteristics protected by law, but also diversity of character and personality, and ways of thinking and interacting. To what extent should universities help students craft their personality and self-expression to suit this process? Would it be logical for universities themselves to consider recruiting on the basis of personality, given this may be just as relevant as academic performance in securing work?

What should the role of the university be in this context?

The professional and policy implications of these findings are discussed in the next chapter, along with the role of signalling theory in helping us understand the phenomenon of early-in-career job-hunting of recent business graduates.

¹⁷⁵ Defined as “the young adults of the 2010s, viewed as being less resilient and more prone to taking offence than previous generations” (One of the 2016 words of the year) (Collins English Dictionary, 2016).

¹⁷⁶ Certainly the job-hunting process for recent graduates is utterly unrecognisable to me, having first graduated some decades ago.

¹⁷⁷ This would be an interesting research experiment.

Chapter 14 - Analysis and Conclusion

Introduction

The central research question for this dissertation is *“How did this group of early-in-career business graduates from a small, private, business-focused institution experience the post-graduation job-hunting transition in terms of the specific activities they underwent in order to secure work during the period 2014-2018?”*

This was answered using a single site case study of recent business graduates that collected qualitative and quantitative data through phone surveys and research interviews with 47 Participants. The research focused exclusively on the Participants’ perspectives, addressing a gap in the literature that has been largely dominated by employer surveys rather than the actual experience of applicants. The predominantly qualitative approach facilitated the collection of rich data on 101 job applications (both successful and unsuccessful) with over 75 employers, made up of 32 graduate schemes, 5 self-employed examples, and 64 general jobs, and including 71 interviews and 108 examples of “other selection activities”. Altogether this enabled a range of perspectives to inform this exploration of the phenomenon of job-hunting.

The first section of this chapter provides a summary of the findings. This is followed by a discussion of the theoretical framework of signalling theory which explores how the theory can help us understand the findings, and how the findings themselves may suggest further insights for the theory. I then discuss implications for professional practice and policy before concluding by conceptualising post-graduation job-hunting as a Zero Sum Game.

Summary of overall findings

First sub-question

The central research question is supported by two sub-questions. The first relates to exploring the specific selection activities set by employers during the job application process:

“What were the specific job selection processes set by employers as experienced by the participants?” The findings on this were shared primarily in Chapters 6-9, and also in Chapter 11.

The findings showed that the Participants experienced a wide range of selection activities including interviews and CV submissions, online tests, presentations, written exercises and teamwork exercises and that on average everyone experienced each of these. However, this “average” experience disguised great differences among the applicants, between successful and unsuccessful applications, and between graduate schemes and general jobs. A rich variety of experience was therefore a key finding and reinforced by the Participants’ descriptions of other selection activities including

asymmetric video exercises, internships with the employer, role-plays and data analysis exercises.

One of the most important findings was that despite a wide range of activities the combination of the traditional interview and CV (or application form) remains by far the most dominant selection tool. Additional selection activities were experienced in only a minority of successful applications.

A second key finding was the rise in the use of technology in the selection activities and in the early stage selection decisions, including online tests, asymmetric video exercises, and the use of key words.

Thirdly, a particularly striking finding was the role of the degree itself. While it was essential to have a degree to be considered for almost all the jobs, the details of the degree such as what they had learned or how well they had done appeared to be of little or no interest to employers in the selection process.

Second sub-question

The second sub-question relates to activities and actions undertaken by the Participants themselves, and not necessarily explicitly required by employers:

“What other actions did the Participants undertake in their attempt to secure work and what other themes emerged that help us understand the phenomenon?” The findings on this question emerged as themes during analysis and were shared primarily in Chapters 10-13.

The most important finding in relation to the second sub-question was the importance of networking. 87% of research interviewees discussed their use of networking. In terms of successful applications, networking played a more common role than any other selection activity apart from interviews and CVs. Digital signalling was closely related to this, such that a second key finding was an emerging “digital intelligence” in using social media and key words to attract employers and to make it through screening rounds, as well as to construct networks. By and large, networking was seen as a professional skill that should be cultivated. It has a significant digital dimension.

Participants also shared details of indirect signalling activities, which included how they dressed, how they decided to behave, and how they demonstrated a commitment to employers. The range of performance tactics was fascinating, from ensuring they were “seen to include others” in teamwork, to looking up the interviewer on LinkedIn just so they would get a notification, to changing their cover letter by “inserting values here” to match the relevant company. Here, in particular, the job-hunting experience came across as a game that the Participants had to work out how best to play. I have deliberately construed many of the selection activities as games by giving them game-style titles to underscore this point. Below I conclude by construing the entire transition experience as a Zero Sum Game.

Overall findings

Overall, a wide range of selection activities was found, made up of definite requirements and processes set by employers, but also activities created and developed by the Participants' themselves. Additionally, there was a very wide variation of experience across Participants.

The typical experience

It is therefore difficult to describe a typical experience, but one can identify distinct job-hunting approaches. It appears that it is possible for graduates to influence the sorts of selection activities they are likely to face by choosing one of these.

As part of the analysis of the individual experiences of the Participants I created a table that summarised the journey to employment for each of the research interviewees. A review of this table enabled the development of a typology of job-hunting approaches. Four over-arching categories were identified and are set out below.

Graduate scheme specialists: these focus almost exclusively on such schemes, and are likely to experience the most selection activities including multiple online tests, asymmetric video exercises, long and time-consuming application forms that will be searched for key words, highly contrived teamwork exercises, and interviews. They need to be prepared for large numbers of rejections, no human interaction at the start, and that statistically they are very unlikely to be successful.

Networkers: these are proactive about meeting people, building links, and making the most of any opportunities to engage with the employer, be it on an internship, a single project or simply a meeting. In some cases they will not need to do any formalised job selection activities to secure work, though most likely they will at least experience an interview and CV submission, and if the role is technical they will need to be able to demonstrate the requisite skill. The ability to network is likely to impact them positively in many job applications and further on in their career. This approach could be seen as the exact opposite of the graduate scheme specialists.

Recruiter focus: these concentrate on their digital presence, feed their profile regularly with activities, brand names and skills, and utilise key words effectively. They attract recruiters and employers to them, and this is more likely to happen when they have an in-demand digital skill. They may also proactively approach recruiters, who then help them throughout the job application process almost as a personal coach.

General job-hunters: these apply for a range of jobs, using a variety of information sources. They primarily need to be good at interviews and writing CVs or application forms, as in most cases there are no other selection activities. During the interview they need to articulate the skills relevant for that employer as well as build some sort of emotional connection. The most likely additional selection activity would be a presentation, possibly based on some data analysis. Networking is very beneficial, and is used in the majority of instances.

In summary there are several types of typical experiences, and many of the Participants moved between approaches at different stages in their job-hunting transition.

What Participants thought employers were seeking

The central research question asks about the Participants' experience, and therefore their perspective on what employers were looking for during the job selection process, as well as their emotional response to the experience.

The findings show Participants identified a rich range of skills they thought employers were seeking, even where they found the selection technique a largely negative experience. However, perhaps the most interesting finding was their recognition of the corporate compliance signals employers were seeking. Participants clearly recognised the necessity of being able to articulate their skills and attributes in a particular way that signalled to employers that they were able and willing to embrace their specific values and competencies. They needed to behave and express themselves so as to indicate they could be a member of the corporate tribe – *homo willing-graduaticus*.¹⁷⁸

Nonetheless, they also intuitively recognised the need to signal uniqueness and to form a personal bond with the employers. This is despite the many – often technological – barriers erected to seemingly prevent this. Many developed techniques to try and signal this bonding ability, and thought that in the end this was the most important signal in actually securing a job offer.

The emotional experience

The most striking finding on the emotional landscape was the difficulty of coping with the dehumanising aspects of job-hunting, especially in relation to graduate schemes. There was a very strong desire to be treated as an individual but a very common experience of being treated as a number. A key finding is the conflicting need to signal compliance with corporate requirements at one stage, but also how they are unique and different at another stage. Signalling theory is used to shed light on these conflicting demands in the discussion below under “double equilibrium”.

Theoretical discussion

There are three aspects of signalling theory I would like to explore in this section. The first is that signals can be better understood as a portfolio of proofpoints that can be plotted on to a spectrum, each signal delineated by its distance from the perfect target information. The second is that the nature of the market equilibrium in the complex context of contemporary job selection can be depicted as a conflicted double equilibrium, rather than the more traditional single equilibrium, from the graduate perspective. Thirdly, the reality of the transition to work experience suggests that three of the fundamental assumptions behind signalling theory may need to be revisited, possibly leading to new aspects of signalling theory in the graduate job selection context. I then consider the overall juxtaposition of the

¹⁷⁸ Apologies to Bourdieu!

weakening signalling power of the degree alongside the seemingly enduring preference for graduates, and the theoretical explanations for this contradiction.

A signalling spectrum

In the first section on the theoretical contribution of this thesis, I outline the notion of a signalling spectrum. The literature on signalling theory often looks at a single signal (eg an educational qualification such as a degree) and uses mathematical modelling to show how a market will reach an equilibrium in response to that signal. Some commentators have called for more exploration of the notion of a portfolio of signals (Connelly *et al.*, 2011) and others for a closer connection between theory and the reality of job selection and the market (Lauder *et al.*, 2012; Brown, Cheung and Lauder, 2015; Manroop and Richardson, 2016; Marginson, 2017). This case study is partly a response to that call, albeit from a qualitative rather than a mathematical perspective. This qualitative approach and the in-depth focus on the signaller's perspective in a real world context utilises signalling theory in a somewhat different way to the more traditional mathematical approaches (Spence, 1973; Perri, 2013, 2016).

It is very clear, based on the findings, that graduate job-hunters are juggling a large number of diverse signals. Consequently I argue that if signalling theory is to be useful in explaining the reality of job-hunting it should ideally be based on a portfolio of signals. I propose that such signals can be classified into several categories, and these are delineated by their *distance from the target of desired information*. Here the desired information is the productivity¹⁷⁹ of graduates as employees. Some signals can be seen as much closer to the target information than others. The signals used by the Participants in this case study can be plotted onto a signalling spectrum.

It is important to remember that it is central to signalling theory that signals are a substitute for real information (Akerlof, 1970; Spence, 1973; Lofgren, Persson and Weibull, 2002). They are a proxy for when the buyer cannot readily discern the quality of the sellers. In this context that means employers are unable to judge the comparative productivity of recent graduates. Signals act as information surrogates and the concept of a signalling spectrum demonstrates that some signals reveal more accurate information than others.

The first category is not signals at all, but real information or “the real thing”. Internships (and other forms of work experience) with the employer fall into this category. Students work with the employers who can see over time whether they

¹⁷⁹ Productivity is used very broadly here to mean best fit as perceived by the employer. Brown argues that productivity is difficult to measure in modern knowledge based work (2004). It is assumed in this dissertation that employers choose the graduates they think will contribute best to their business.

have the requirements for the role. Further “signals” are not needed, not even necessarily the degree itself^{cliv}. Internships were discussed in Chapter 8.¹⁸⁰

The second category is direct signals. These are based on activities in which employers test for certain skills. Whether a candidate has presentation skills is assessed via a presentation, the ability to collaborate through a teamwork exercise and so on. The results of the test are signals that indicate to the employer the candidate may have those skills and therefore be more productive. Direct signals were discussed in Chapters 7 and 8 and include role-plays, data analysis exercises, written exercises as well as teamwork and presentations.

Note that within this category some signals are more direct than others. Being required to give a presentation is a relatively direct way of assessing presentation skills. However, teamwork exercises as described in Chapter 7 tend to be highly contrived and therefore less of an indication of what someone would really be like as a team member. Online tests are even more artificial. By contrast those on an internship with the company will have actually worked in a team in an authentic environment, even if it was not labelled as a team working exercise.

The third category is articulated signals. Applicants signal the presence of skills not through demonstration but through articulation. This is typically done through CVs, application forms and interviews. “Talking the talk” is required here, rather than “walking the walk”. For example, in relation to teamwork, a candidate would explain how she has worked in a team in the past, rather than being observed in an actual team exercise. Given the overriding importance of interviews and CVs, the ability to articulate the presence of desirable attributes is probably the number one skill graduate job-hunters need. This was discussed in Chapter 9.

The fourth category is indirect signals. These have little apparent bearing on the job, either because they are irrelevant (eg the colour of applicants’ ties) or because they are untrue (eg applicants feigning enthusiasm) or because they are a calculated gaming tactic (eg some of the digital signalling examples). But they are still part of the selection process. They may be signals deliberately created by candidates. They can also be unconscious.¹⁸¹ These were discussed in Chapter 10.

This is a spectrum, so there are shades of difference rather than hard lines between categories. For example indirect signals may not be completely irrelevant, and they may not be completely untrue. Similarly, people on an internship may still be “performing” to some extent, as indeed are all employees.

¹⁸⁰ Chapter 8 looks at the “other” activities required in the selection process. For the small number based on internships and work experience, employers had the opportunity to select based on the real thing, the first category in our spectrum.

¹⁸¹ For example the way you dress (BBC, 2016; Social Mobility Commission, 2016); not looking interviewers up on LinkedIn where it may be interpreted as a lack of interest (Pz.02#16); mistakenly trying to “win” in a teamwork exercise rather than focusing on including others (Pz.07##4)

It is submitted that an understanding of the nature of signals produced by job-hunters can be enhanced by placing them along this signalling spectrum, and noting, in particular, how far they are from the target information.

A double equilibrium

In the second section on theory I propose the emergence of a conflicted double equilibrium in the graduate job-hunting market. The literature on signalling often demonstrates mathematically how certain sets of assumptions and signals resolve into an “equilibrium” of some kind, meaning a steady state that is the result of market behaviours based on those assumptions and signals (Perri, 2013, 2016). Equilibriums are broadly categorised into two types: pooling and separating. As Akerlof demonstrates, it is also possible for the market to collapse altogether (1970).

A pooling equilibrium is one in which sellers are indistinguishable from each other as they all look the same. Put another way it is difficult for the buyer to distinguish high quality and low quality sellers from within the pool. Perhaps there is no difference in quality in some situations.¹⁸²

A separating equilibrium is where all sellers are distinguishable from each other, and therefore buyers can rank them from top to bottom according to their assessment of quality.

Based on the findings of this thesis, I propose that viewed from the graduate’s perspective, the university-work transition does not appear to resolve into a single equilibrium. Instead, it creates two types of equilibrium that are triggered at different stages. The first is a pooling equilibrium, in which candidates need to show how they match the criteria of the employer, whether it is getting the right score on an online test, playing value snap in an application form, “hitting the key words” in an asymmetric video exercise, having a degree, etc.

Overall, candidates need to signal using the language of the “competency discourse” (Brown, Hesketh and Williams, 2004). The criteria is set by the employers and is the same for all applicants. While this is no doubt considered “fair” and “best practice” from an HR perspective, I would like to suggest that it has a curious effect in terms of signalling. By setting identical requirements for all, buyers (employers) influence the creation of signals, and drive the equilibrium to everyone producing the same signal. Where everyone produces the same signal they cannot be differentiated, and one can only have a pooling equilibrium. Therefore pooling is a result not just of the universities and their tendency towards homogenisation (Marginson, 2016a), but also because of the employers and their universal criteria. Graduates inevitably respond to these forces by creating identical signals. Diversity is generally discussed in relation to protected characteristics and the admission to certain institutions and jobs of under-

¹⁸² See Brown’s suggestion that job selection is about large scale *rejection of qualified candidates*, (emphasis added) and Perri’s mathematical modelling of high levels of highly qualified applicants leading to a pooling equilibrium of widely available high quality (Brown, Hesketh and Williams, 2004; Perri, 2013).

represented groups, but here we can see that the overall system is creating a monoculture of signals. Perhaps concerns about diversity should be extended and consideration given to how to diversify the signalling ecosystem.

I submit that these forces inevitably create a pooling equilibrium. In order to not be screened out of the pool, one must show how one matches the criteria, not how one stands out. Individuality is not necessary. On the contrary, employers are looking for a standard criteria match and sift accordingly.

However, once through the initial screening (which may include multiple levels of activities in the job-hunting game), the nature of the equilibrium changes. Employers now need to make individual choices, and to find a means to rank the applicants from highest quality to lowest quality.¹⁸³ For this they are looking for signals of uniqueness and high value, ie indications that applicants literally “stand out from the crowd”. This is a separating equilibrium.

I suggest that this notion of a double equilibrium is not something that has been greatly explored in signalling theory, at least not in the graduate job selection context, and it would be interesting to see if it could be expressed mathematically in further research. The traditional concept of a single equilibrium is not what is being seen in the real world of graduate job-hunting according to this study.

The double equilibrium explains the contradictory forces the Participants seem to have experienced. The need to fit in and to play what the audience wants to hear, and the concomitant feeling of being treated as a number are necessary to become part of the pooling equilibrium. A pooling equilibrium is one in which everyone effectively sends the same signal, or chooses to play the same strategy in game theory terminology (Tadelis, 2013).¹⁸⁴

This sits alongside the need to stand out (or play different strategies) and show individual value in order to make it high enough up the quality ladder to get a job offer. This is the separating equilibrium in which everyone sends a different and unique signal.

This means that in the job-hunting game candidates need to know that there are two equilibriums, which equilibrium applies when, and whether to be in “compliance mode” or “USP mode”. Therefore, in the context of a double equilibrium signalling also has a temporal element.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸³ Quality being entirely in the eyes of the beholding employer.

¹⁸⁴ An interesting idea to contemplate is that this is because employers require the same signal from all applicants (leading to the box fitting game for example) and therefore everyone creates the same signal.

¹⁸⁵ The double equilibrium may also explain why some students do not realise there is a separating equilibrium, and mistakenly think the degree and grades are enough. It could also explain why other students see the degree as a tick box exercise – and in signalling theory terms they may be correct. One could say that graduates treat it as a tick box exercise because it is treated by employers as such. It

Revisiting signalling assumptions

In this section I review three key signalling assumptions, and how they apply in the contemporary UK context. Signalling and human capital theories are intimately related, particularly if one argues that the signals employers are seeking are related to productivity and skills. Human capital theory has been much criticised as being disconnected with the reality of the global labour market and supply side limitations (Brown, Lauder and Ashton, 2011; Keep, 2011; Lauder *et al.*, 2012; Brown, Cheung and Lauder, 2015). Marginson (2017) also contends that there is a pattern of over-reliance on mathematical models and incorrect assumptions applied to statistical methods, and that this combination can lead to inaccurate and misleading conclusions¹⁸⁶ and Manroop makes similar criticisms in relation to the job search literature (Manroop and Richardson, 2016; Manroop, 2017).

I suggest that such criticisms also apply to signalling theory. Specifically, in the real world context of graduate job-hunting some of the traditional assumptions of signalling theory might not always apply, leading to a need to develop signalling theory with a different set of assumptions. Here I interrogate three of these assumptions.

Assumption one: Sellers know their own quality and buyers do not.

Signalling emerged as a response to failures in market information that prevent markets working according to classic economic theory. It is based on the assumption that in some markets sellers are aware of the quality of the goods they are trying to sell (eg sellers of used cars) but buyers cannot easily perceive the quality of those goods. These are known as markets of asymmetric information. To use Akerlof's seminal analogy, "*The Market for Lemons*", buyers cannot distinguish low quality cars (Akerlof's lemons) from high quality cars (I have extended the analogy to call these oranges). In such a situation sellers can use signals to inform buyers of their quality eg by including a car warranty in the transaction (Akerlof, 1970).

In this case study the buyers are employers, the sellers are graduate applicants and the quality relates to productivity ie how valuable an employee the sellers would be. I use the phrase "lemons" for applicants with lower quality productivity and "oranges" for those with higher quality productivity.

I propose that in the graduate job-hunting context this first assumption may be incorrect as *the seller may not know their own productivity or quality*. Graduates simply do not know how they will perform in the workplace, nor how much profit they may add to the employer. They may imagine they would be very valuable (perhaps they were top of the class) or they may lack confidence and think they are of low value (just think of an employee who is underpaid for the work she does in

also explains why employers are not very interested in degree details, as it is only used for pooling purposes.

¹⁸⁶ For example, he says that in much research, variables are assumed to be independent when in fact they may be dependent, and that the use of multivariate analysis in such circumstances is inappropriate leading to misleading conclusions

comparison to others) – but in both cases their self-assessment could be wrong. Far from the seller knowing and the buyer not knowing (the classic asymmetrical information problem), in this situation the buyer may be better informed about the likely employment quality of an applicant based on their interview, CV and other selection activities. They may know what signals to look for (and note their apparent lack of interest in grades), whereas the applicant may not (students are often highly focused on grades).

Alternatively, and even more challenging to traditional signalling theory assumptions, I would like to propose that *neither party may know the likely productivity of the applicant*. Brown presents an interesting argument on how it is very difficult to assess individual productivity in knowledge economy (2004). He gives two key reasons for this; the nature of the work is ephemeral and therefore difficult to measure, and modern day knowledge-based work is often highly collaborative in nature. He concludes that it is doubtful that individual productivity can be measured in modern knowledge-based employment.

If my proposal is correct, it means the selection activities used by employers are not signalling productivity at all. If so, what is their function? Two explanations leap to mind. Firstly, selection teams might believe they are assessing productivity, even if they are not, in a kind of job selection alchemy (Keenan, 1979, 1995; Anderson and Viv Shackleton, 1991; Silvester, 1997; Harvey, 2001; Cutts, Hooley and Yates, 2015; Pollard *et al.*, 2015). This could explain why many of the participants were irritated at “faux” activities, but more positive about activities that obviously linked to the job role, as they felt the former were not assessing anything relevant. It would also indicate that there is a need for more research to explore the link between selection activities and likely productivity (Brown, Hesketh and Williams, 2004; Holmes and Mayhew, 2016).

Secondly, employers receive many applications, sometimes in the tens of thousands, and need to find a pragmatic way to sift them and make some sort of selection (Keenan, 1995; Lam and Hawkes, 2017; Anon, 2018b; High Fliers Research, 2019b). Brown describes an emerging “*technology of rejection*” and that many graduate schemes are more about how to reject qualified candidates in their thousands, rather than about selection for productivity (2004). The selection activities enable a narrative of “objective rejection”, even if the link with measuring productivity is weak (Brown, Hesketh and Williams, 2004).

Assumption two: The cost of creating a signal has an inverse relationship to the quality of the seller.

This is another fundamental assumption of signalling theory. Cost is not just financial¹⁸⁷ but also includes things like time and effort (Spence, 1973).

¹⁸⁷ As Spence (1973) noted some higher quality universities in the U.S.A. are far more expensive than others but produce (arguably) “higher quality” graduates.

For example, if a seller has a low quality used car (a lemon), a warranty will be far more expensive than for another seller with a high quality used car (an orange). The buyer recognises that the car with a warranty must be higher quality or the seller could not afford to provide the warranty. However, if it was just as easy for the owner of a lemon to offer the same warranty as the owner of an orange, then everyone would offer identical warranties and the buyer could no longer distinguish between high and low quality sellers. Therefore, the signal (in this analogy the warranty) must be cheaper for the high quality seller or else the entire market would mimic the signal, and it would no longer be effective.

Now turning to the graduate selection market in the UK, as explored in this case study, is this assumption valid? Is it less expensive for the higher quality candidate to produce the signal of a degree?¹⁸⁸ I argue that it is not. Let us look at financial, time, and effort costs.

In terms of financial cost, degrees in the UK are almost universally the same price, unlike in the USA (the context discussed in Spence's 1973 paper). Even where there is variation, the repayment percentage is the same, only the term is different. This means any beneficial impact on price differential is not felt for many years (HM Government, 2019). In fact, those that earn more (the more productive and therefore higher quality graduates for our purposes) will actually pay more each year than the lower quality graduates.

In terms of time cost, the UK undergraduate degree is dominated by the traditional three-year model. Part-time numbers have greatly decreased (Callender and Thompson, 2018), and government attempts to encourage accelerated degrees have so far not taken off (Department for Education, 2018a). Therefore the time cost is largely similar across graduates.

In terms of effort cost, there is an interesting paradox in UK HE. One argument is that "academically brighter" students would need less effort to earn a degree.¹⁸⁹ Yet curiously, research on the amount of study hours undertaken by students seems to show the exact opposite – those at highly selective universities actually make more effort (Which?, 2013; Freitag and Hillman, 2018).

Therefore in terms of these three measures of signalling cost (time, finances, and effort) it is not necessarily the case that high quality sellers produce their degree signal at a lower cost than low quality sellers. One could easily argue that the opposite applies.

I therefore propose that the assumption that the degree signal is less expensive for high quality sellers is not necessarily applicable in the context of contemporary graduate job-hunting. This has important consequences for signalling. Returning to Akerlof's analogy, it is the equivalent of all used car sellers being able to give the same

¹⁸⁸ Which could perhaps be regarded as a warranty of productivity, to build on the analogy

¹⁸⁹ Leading to an implicit assumption of higher productivity quality.

warranty, irrespective of whether their car is a lemon or an orange (1970). In short the warranty can no longer act as an effective signal. I suggest that this is exactly what could be happening in relation to degrees,¹⁹⁰ and why the degree is no longer sufficient and why employers are not very interested in the details of the degree.

I would go even further and suggest that far from looking for a signal that is less expensive for high quality candidates, there is another possible interpretation of what is happening, evidenced in this case study. And that is that employers are demanding “expensive” signals from all candidates and using that as a selection tool under the guise of assessing “motivation” and “attitude”. In this instance the more expensive the signal the better. “Expense” refers to time, effort and emotional expense, as well as financial expense needed to support extra-curricula opportunities. This can be seen in the demand for a display of personal commitment to company values, the insistence on researching the company thoroughly, the multiple gateways designed to sift (aka reject people) that take considerable time and effort, the construction of a dehumanising experience that tests how keen people are for the job, and the increasing importance of the second syllabus. In other words, employers are creating selection techniques where *those that make the greater effort* are chosen. This is the opposite of traditional signalling theory which assumes the higher quality sellers are distinguishable on the basis of needing to make less effort.

This could be seen as an upside down buyers’ market in which the sellers are compelled to become the “buyers” of attractive signals. Those willing and able to make the “payment” win. Is there any evidence for this outside of this case study? One logical result would be that the wealthier would win more often, as they would have more resources to “purchase” the signal. Another would be an educational (and associated extra-curricula) arms race. And there is, in fact, evidence for both these trends (Bangerter *et al.*, 2012; Jerrim, 2014; Brown, 2016; Verhaest *et al.*, 2018).

An intriguing question arises. What happens to signalling theory if the signals can be “bought” and paying more increases rather than decreases your chances of success?

Assumption three: High quality sellers will exit the market if they are unable to signal their superiority convincingly.

Akerlof explains how the lack of information that enables discernment of choice by the buyer leads to the lemons problem, and that low quality sellers will increasingly dominate the market until ultimately the market collapses altogether (1970). There is no point in a higher quality seller existing and investing in a particular signal if their superior quality is not recognised, so they withdraw, starting with the highest quality, and repeating the process by gradations until there is none, or only one (lowest) quality remaining and therefore no choice, no competition and no market.

Therefore the ability to signal in markets where there is a lack of information (cf the classic economic market) is essential for the market to exist, otherwise all the oranges exit.

¹⁹⁰ See below under the signalling function of the degree.

How does this apply to the reality of graduate selection in the UK? Initially Spence wrote about the signalling impact of degrees (1973). Having a degree signalled high quality potential employees, as gaining a degree would be too difficult and expensive for low quality applicants. Low quality applicants could not readily mimic high quality applicants, and therefore the degree worked as a signal of discernment. This explained the greater employment prospects of graduates.

However, the significant increase in the number of graduates indicates that it is possible for many more people to earn the high quality signal of a degree than was perhaps previously believed. Under assumption three, this should lead to high quality sellers exiting the market. Yet the opposite appears to be happening. In the UK we now have the highest percentage of school leavers attending university than ever before (Department for Education, 2018c). This is despite numerous newspaper reports about a potentially falling graduate premium, graduate under-employment, and questioning whether it is worth going to university (Pareto Law, 2015; Johnson, 2016a; Cooper, 2018; Sodha, 2018). If graduates are perceived as high quality (as per Spence's original paper (1973)), then far from exiting they have increased dramatically. And there is no evidence that the subset of the highest quality (ie those with the top grades) amongst them are exiting. Why have they not exited in accordance with Akerlof's theory (1970)? In order to understand this issue, I set out four possible explanatory discourses for the trend of increasing participation and in each case their link to signalling theory.

Falling standards

The dramatic increase in university attendance and graduation indicates that earning a degree is becoming more attainable for more people. Some argue that this is because degrees have become easier to earn, grades have been inflated and standards have fallen (OfS, 2018c). In signalling terms this means the lemons (those previously without graduate skills) are able to position themselves to resemble oranges (highly skilled graduates) when they are not. They are able to do this because "standards have fallen". Under this perspective the market would become dominated by graduates without true graduate skills –not because highly skilled graduates are exiting but because many underqualified graduates are arriving. So assumption three may be partly right, with highly skilled graduates (the oranges) forming a smaller proportion of the sellers rather than exiting altogether. Evidence for this viewpoint might be the lack of growth in numbers of graduate scheme jobs (AGR, 2016; High Fliers Research, 2019b),¹⁹¹ and that the overall average graduate premium appears to be falling, at least for some (Brown, Lauder and Ashton, 2011; Johnson, 2016b; Kemp-King, 2016). The "true" oranges (the "more able" graduates often from "elite" universities) still go on to "elite" graduate schemes, but overall there would be a decreasing average premium due to the extra "lemony scent" of the graduate cohort as a whole (extra lemons diluting the orangey scent). The result would not be an

¹⁹¹ The latter shows graduate scheme positions have just reached 2007 levels. Note that the increase in graduates over this time period means the percentage of such positions of the graduate numbers has decreased.

exodus of high quality sellers, but a greater polarisation of the value of the graduate premium. This does appear to be happening (Brown, Cheung and Lauder, 2015; Mayhew, 2016; Salvatori, 2018).

Rising standards

An alternative viewpoint is that there are many more oranges than may have been realised in the past and that standards are rising as more people have the opportunity to be educated. This resonates with perspectives related to Bourdieu (Bourdieu and Passeron, 2000) in which the education system operates as a faux meritocracy designed to justify the colonisation by the elite of higher status and wealth positions in society. One could argue that this faux meritocracy has now been exposed, and true ability and potential is widespread, and not limited to a small number of highly able (and predominantly wealthy) people, whose “high quality” can supposedly be seen in their educational credentials.¹⁹² It is clear that in English higher education, the hierarchy of the university system plays a major role in reproducing advantage and disadvantage: socially advantaged students are more often selected by elite universities with strong networks to elite companies in a virtuous and self-serving circle.

Perri (2013) develops signalling theory by looking at the impact on equilibrium (market state outcome) where an increasing percentage of high quality sellers enter the market. He uses a mathematical approach to show that this leads to a pooling equilibrium of many high quality candidates. He shows that this results in an increase in overall standards and that at a certain point it is no longer worthwhile signalling difference, as the return for everyone increases as the average quality is higher across the board. This is an optimistic analysis when applied to graduates, but unfortunately it assumes there are enough buyers ie enough highly skilled well-paid jobs. If there are demand side restrictions then I suggest the logical result would be intensive additional signalling, not a reduction in signalling as posited by Perri.

The findings in this case study indicate that this could be exactly what is happening. Rising standards leads to the importance of signalling additional features beyond the degree itself. This also means a deeper understanding of a portfolio of signals is much needed.

The degree is and always was a faux signal

In terms of signalling theory, signals are only needed where perfect information is missing. The signal of a degree is a substitute for true knowledge of a person’s productivity. Spence’s (1973) argument is that degrees operate as a signal irrespective of whether they actually develop human capital. But it would be logical for employers to use degrees because of an assumption, or at least a rational hope,

¹⁹² See the discussion on how a wealthy elite continues to colonise the very highest paid jobs with such arguments in Brown (2011) and Rivera (2015). The income differential is justified by themselves as they are exceptionally able (Brown, Lauder and Ashton, 2011). This also links to concerns over executive pay (Brown, Hesketh and Williams, 2004).

that a degree does in fact indicate more able, intelligent, skilled and therefore productive employees.

I suggest that one could argue that the increase in graduates shows that this assumption was incorrect, and degrees are not, and never have been, a good signal of likely productivity (Holmes and Mayhew, 2016). In past decades non-graduates have been rejected on the basis that a graduate was likely to be more productive, but the rising participation rate and more critical perspectives indicate a degree is not necessarily a signal of inherent ability so much as of people who have had better opportunities.

This is linked to the cost of creating the degree signal (eg going to private school, being part of a wealthier socio-economic group, studying hard, receiving extra coaching and educational and cultural opportunities (Jerrim, 2014)) and the interesting possibility that employers chose graduates on the assumption of greater ability vis-a-vis non-graduates, but actually all they chose were those who had the resources to spend more on creating the degree signal, some of whom may have been wealthy lemons, while also perhaps missing out on poor oranges. Evidence to support this could be the on-going link between wealth and educational attainment (Jerrim, 2014), and the fact that students from comprehensive schools with the same school results do better at university than those from private schools (Henry, 2013; HEFCE, 2014; Vidal Rodeiro and Zanini, 2015). Perhaps this suggests that once the extra cost is removed, many of the “high quality” students could turn out to be more lemony than their school results indicate.

Under this explanation a degree is not, and never was, an indicator of higher quality and productivity.

Exit blocked

Akerlof (1970) assumes it is possible for high quality signallers to exit the market eg through moving or starting their own business (Lofgren, Persson and Weibull, 2002). I suggest this is not realistic. Whereas the producer or owner of a product may have the opportunity to change their business, graduates by in large need to find employment. Exiting is not a feasible option for most.

Therefore, rather than assuming high quality sellers will exit the market, I suggest we should assume the exit is blocked in this context. If so, the logical result would be a cascade effect, with many high quality sellers having to settle for a lower “fee” ie a lower quality job (Beaudry, Green and Sand, 2016; Yunus and Hamid, 2016; Reinhold and Thomsen, 2017b). This would lead to the phenomenon of under-employment and increased competition for jobs, and not only graduate scheme jobs. According to many commentators this is exactly what is happening (Cappelli, 2012; Salvatori, 2018). This appears to be the natural result of the concatenation of failing to grow the

demand side, having more sellers (whether oranges or lemons) enter the market, and blocking the exit for high quality sellers.¹⁹³

With the exit blocked, and oranges stuck in the equilibrium, it would also be logical for buyers to find they are in a position to demand increasingly expensive signals. And this is indeed what appears to be happening. Evidence for this is in the ever growing list of employers' "requirements" discussed in the literature review, (Harvey and Green, 1994; Cremin, 2009), and the growing range of selection demands reported in the findings of this case study.

I therefore suggest that in the world of contemporary graduate job-hunting, three of the fundamental assumptions behind signalling theory may need to be revisited to explain what is happening in reality. It would be fascinating to develop aspects of the theory using different – even opposite – assumptions to see what light can be shed on the phenomenon of the university-work transition.

Having provided an analysis of certain aspects of signalling theory – the signalling spectrum, the conflicted double equilibrium, and the changing nature of assumptions - I now use this to reflect on two final points that sit in juxtaposition to each other: the weakening signalling power of the degree and the seemingly enduring employer preference for graduates.

The signalling function of the degree

One of the striking findings of this case study is the limited importance of the formal degree. As an educationalist who has spent the last six years establishing a new higher education provider, this is hardly something I expected or wanted to find! Nonetheless, it appears that while a degree was undoubtedly essential for virtually all the jobs discussed, this was primarily as a binary gateway into the earlier stages of an application. Employers did not appear to look at the details of the degree – not the content nor the grades.¹⁹⁴ Instead, 3600 learning hours, numerous modules and topics, and a variety of assessments were distilled to a simple binary output. Do you have a degree? Yes or no. And in some cases, do you have a 2:1? Yes or no.

Given the amount of time and money spent by society as a whole on undergraduate degrees, this seems surprising. Even more so when one considers the high level of expertise used to design and deliver degrees, given universities are generally seen as

¹⁹³ I suggest that if signalling fails to identify quality differentials clearly, then the impact will be somewhat random with some "lemons" in high quality jobs and some "oranges" in lower quality jobs. If Brown is right and employers cannot assess productivity effectively for knowledge based work, then one consequence is that the signal could become the be all and end all – not productivity. This would presumably exacerbate the development of credentialism (Brown, 2016; Brown *et al.*, 2016).

¹⁹⁴ Behind the scenes – and out of sight of the Participants - there may have been more consideration of the details of the degree, based on the CV and application forms. However, this seems unlikely given it was never discussed and that CVs and transcripts do not generally show details of the syllabus. It would be interesting to research from the employers' perspective what attitude they take to grades and syllabus content, and why.

bastions of knowledge and experts in both subject matter and pedagogy. Why not make the most of this expertise? There is also the government discourse encouraging student investment in university study because of the development of skills highly valued by employers (Browne, 2010; Williams, 2014; Willetts, 2015; BIS, 2016a). Should not this make the content of degrees of interest during job selection? Yet despite this expenditure, expertise and policy, the content¹⁹⁵ of the degree appears of little interest to employers.

So what is happening here? One explanation from signalling theory is that the degree is failing to act as a signal of quality differentiation. This could be the logical consequence of the issues with some of the assumptions discussed above. If neither buyers nor sellers can actually judge the productivity quality of the sellers (assumption one), and if cost is not necessarily lower for high quality applicants (assumption two), and if high quality sellers are not able to exit the market (assumption three) then taken together this would undermine the effectiveness of the degree as a signal. This would be exacerbated by limited numbers of highly skilled jobs on the demand side (Lauder *et al.*, 2012). Instead, the degree signal is replaced, or at least heavily supplemented, with other signals. Some are generated by the buyers (eg online tests) and others by the sellers (eg extra-curricula activities). As the exit is blocked for most high quality sellers, employers are also able to ask for expensive signals of various kinds. Is it possible that this is what a degree has become? Not so much a signal of quality differentiation, but more of a signal of willingness to make the payment to “buy” the signal?

One has to ask, why do employers not use the details of the degree to differentiate sellers? In the UK degrees are not all the same. Universities design and validate their own distinctive degrees as autonomous institutions. At the site for this case study a great deal is invested in designing degrees, working with employers, academics and students to create something intended to be unique. If employers were interested in what graduates have learnt at different institutions it would be possible to discuss this in the application process, just as they discuss extra-curricula activities. After all, in most significant purchases a buyer looks at the detail of what is provided across different companies, and uses that comparative information to make a choice. Yet these findings suggest this does not appear to happen in this context.

Therefore, it seems the degree is not acting as an effective signal *because employers are not choosing to look at it*. That sounds simplistic, but my point is that employers *could* use the detail of the degree as a means of choosing between different candidates¹⁹⁶. But they choose not to do so. Degrees appear to be used to help form a pooling equilibrium, separating graduates and non-graduates, but not as a quality differentiator amongst graduates.¹⁹⁷ It is not clear why this is the case. Whatever the

¹⁹⁵ I am using content broadly to include knowledge, skills, assessment and pedagogy.

¹⁹⁶ Though this would have its own issues beyond the scope of this thesis.

¹⁹⁷ There is some differentiation relating to grades (eg a minimum of a 2:1) and of university attended, though the latter is not to do with the degree itself so much as an endorsement signal from a

explanation, the result is that universities are delivering degrees with very weak signalling ability.

Theoretical explanations for the preference for graduates

Yet despite the weakening signal of a degree, there is evidence of a clear preference for graduates (Department for Education, 2017d). Government policy has encouraged and enabled a significant increase in the number of people attending university, ostensibly on the basis of a growing need for more highly skilled graduates in order to fuel a knowledge-based economy (Brown, Hesketh and Williams, 2004; Brown, Cheung and Lauder, 2015; CIPD, 2016a; Holmes and Mayhew, 2016). Commentators are sceptical and argue that the promise of an increase in such jobs has been based on little more than a hope (Brown, Hesketh and Williams, 2004; Lauder *et al.*, 2012; Mayhew, 2016; Yunus and Hamid, 2016). Analyses of labour market trends indicate they may be right (Lauder *et al.*, 2012; Holmes and Mayhew, 2015; CIPD, 2016b; Lambert and Herbert, 2017; Salvatori, 2018). Certainly graduate scheme roles at “top” employers have not increased since 2007 (High Fliers Research, 2019b)¹⁹⁸ even though that is where you might reasonably expect any growth in knowledge-based workers to be apparent.

The government discourse is squarely based on human capital theory and promotes investment by students in degree study because they will develop transferable skills and knowledge, valued by employers, and have improved chances of career success. There is a logic to this narrative, and it is also an optimistic message as it implies self-efficacy for students with a correlation between their effort and ability, the development of useful skills and knowledge, and employment outcomes.

Evidence for this perspective is the fact that graduates have better employment prospects than non-graduates overall. In short, employers prefer graduates and are willing to pay a premium for them (Department for Education, 2017e).

What is not clear is why. There are several theories that try to explain this phenomenon.

Human capital theory explains this by arguing graduates have acquired productivity related skills through education. However, this has been criticised and considerable evidence put forward to challenge it (Lauder *et al.*, 2012; Brown, Cheung and Lauder, 2015; Marginson, 2017) including my arguments on the weak binary signalling power of the degree discussed above.

The theory of credentialism effectively depicts graduate job selection as an arms race where those with bigger and better credentials win (Brown, 2003, 2018; Bangerter *et al.*, 2012; Cappelli, 2012; Di Stasio, Bol and Van de Werfhorst, 2016). As I have argued

prestigious university. In any case these still form large pools of qualified applicants which are then distinguished using information other than the degree details.

¹⁹⁸ Additionally the same report shows that median starting salary of new graduates at these companies has remained flat for five years now.

above, if the exit from the market is blocked, trapping growing numbers of high quality sellers, then an arms race is the logical outcome. Far from graduates getting increasingly highly skilled and well paid jobs, a cascade effect comes into play where graduate skills and credentials become selection criteria for a much larger range of lower level jobs. This theory is supported by the evidence of over-qualification and under-employment of graduates (Chan and Yang, 2015; Beaudry, Green and Sand, 2016; Reinhold and Thomsen, 2017b; Salvatori, 2018; Verhaest *et al.*, 2018).

Finally, the Bourdieusian positional conflict theory argues that degrees are used to reinforce the status quo of the wealthier ruling classes, disguised under a faux meritocracy of educational qualifications that are actually subtly and indirectly “bought” by those who can afford them (Bourdieu and Passeron, 2000; Brown, Cheung and Lauder, 2015).¹⁹⁹ As a result, employment outcomes are considerably higher for those that start from a higher socio-economic position. While socio-economic background is not explored in this case study, there is strong extant evidence to support this theory in the data that shows that the wealthy benefit far more than the poor from the educational system (Lauder *et al.*, 2012; Jerrim, 2014; Brown, Cheung and Lauder, 2015; Rivera, 2015; Sullivan *et al.*, 2016).

The three theories of human capital, credentialism, and positional conflict, are often rendered as alternative explanations for the preference for graduates. But as Marginson (2017) argues, they can be linked together and all appear to play a role. I suggest that in a pragmatic sense signalling could be seen as an important component of each of these theories, effectively providing the economic and informational mechanics of how hiring decisions are made. Human capital and positional conflict explain the types of signals being sought by employers. For example the skills tested in the selection process support a human capital explanation, whereas the need to demonstrate that an applicant can “fit in” supports positional conflict. Credentialism, I argue, is the outcome of an equilibrium where one of the fundamental assumptions of signalling theory is reversed ie that high quality candidates can realistically exit the market. Where they cannot do so, I argue that credentialism is a logical result.

Understanding why employers prefer graduates is important because of what it means for students. This case study has demonstrated the apparent weakness of the degree signal, in that it operates as a binary gateway only. This means it helps graduates to pool, but not to separate. Without separation, there is no job offer. Separation comes with the second syllabus.²⁰⁰ Many students do not understand this. They are being encouraged to invest in a degree because it will get them a job, but this is not the case. It is the additional activity and experiences and the use of effective job-hunting techniques that secure job offers. The expense of such activities may not necessarily be included in the tuition fee, or even can be offered by the university (eg work experience). It is important that students make the space for such

¹⁹⁹ Bought here means significantly enhancing the chances of a positive outcome using resources not available to others rather than directly “buying” a qualification.

²⁰⁰ Defined very broadly to include all activities outside the formal syllabus, including internships.

activities, but many may not if they do not realise their significance. Instead they spend time on assessments and worrying about marks (imagining they are part of a separating equilibrium) because they do not understand the nature of signalling. They are not “buying” the signal they think they are buying. Whether this should be communicated to students is discussed below.

Policy and professional practice implications

In this final section I consider what the empirical findings and theoretical insights discussed above mean for policy and professional practice. Four aspects are explored: how universities could potentially respond to the weakening degree signal, whether they should communicate differently to students, the pedagogical design implications of trying to ensure graduates secure work, and whether responsibility for graduate employment rates should be allocated to universities. The danger of reduced signal strength.

The weakening signalling power of the degree could be dangerous waters for universities to find themselves in. A failure for the degree itself to operate as a quality differentiating signal in a time of mass participation means both that employment decisions will become increasingly disconnected from the degree, and that people will increasingly question the point of studying for a degree. I argue that a lack of interest in the content of the degree or the assessment and grades is evidence that human capital theory is not playing a very strong role in hiring decisions. If degrees were truly equipping graduates with relevant skills and knowledge then surely it would be logical for employers to be interested in what they studied and how well they did. But, at least in terms of this study, they seem markedly uninterested. Employers are also implicitly rejecting the assessment methodology honed by centuries of expertise in universities, and preferring instead to substitute their own assessments, even though this can be a very expensive exercise (AGR, 2016; High Fliers Research, 2019b) and may or may not be valid (Keenan, 1995; Brown, Hesketh and Williams, 2004).

This disconnect could ultimately undermine support for universities by making them seem less relevant to the needs of society. Furthermore, Higher Education regulation is increasingly assessing universities on the employment outcomes of its graduates (Dept for Education, 2016; Gyimah, 2018; HESA, 2018e, 2019b; OfS, 2018b; UNISTATS, 2018a). And to be assessed on something disconnected from an institution’s core work may well lead to skewed data, flawed reports and bizarre incentives that are not helpful for students, institutions or policy makers. How should universities respond to this dilemma? I suggest three possible options.

Option one: focus on the second syllabus

In one sense this could be liberating for universities. If employers are uninterested in the content of degrees, then universities may as well design and deliver a curriculum based on other principles such as education for citizenship, blue sky thinking, or pure academic interest, with little reference to employer requirements. Employers can

create long lists of needs, but there is no point embedding them into the formal degree if the degree itself is never examined.

Instead, more resource could be put into training graduates specifically in job-hunting skills and getting them internships. Gaining that first post-graduation job is an important marker for long-term employment outcomes (Richards, 1984b; Steffy, Shaw and Noe, 1989; Saks and Ashforth, 1999), and therefore helping them develop techniques specifically to secure a job could be far more important than attempting to teach work skills per se. This case study demonstrates there is a range of techniques that could be taught, many unconnected to academic study or to the actual workplace, but important in the graduate job-hunting game. These include digital signalling, how to display teamwork, how to articulate competencies and values, and how to perform in asymmetric video exercises. At the same time, the traditional techniques of interviews and CVs continue to dominate, and therefore an ability to articulate the presence of skills and attitudes (rather than demonstrate them) is probably the most important thing to learn. Universities could also add another skill: the ability for graduates to recognise which type of equilibrium applies at different stages and how to adapt their compliance/USP strategies accordingly.

Option two: improve the differentiation of degrees

Research why employers do not use this signal

An alternative approach for the sector could be to improve the signalling power of the degree. I suggest there is a need for further research on how employers make their graduate selection decisions and to understand why they do not look at the degree itself. One answer may be that they see the degree as irrelevant, another that they see them as all the same. Alternatively they may trust the university to develop skills relevant for employment (and therefore do not need to look at any details), or they may distrust universities and therefore feel the need to create their own tests. Understanding the employers' perspective would help guide any action in response.

Review the regulatory pressures of sameness and slowness

It may also be useful to consider some of the regulatory pressures and accepted practices in relation to degree design. Despite the fact that it is possible for business degrees to be very different to each other, there is pressure for "consistency" that arises from some elements of the regulatory system. For example, most subjects have "benchmark statements" (an outline syllabus) (QAA, 2015), and degree design teams are expected to take these into account and even "map" how their new degree design "matches". This leads to similarity of curriculum.

New degrees are approved via validation panels which include experts from other institutions who expect to see certain details in any degree in "their" subject. This can lead to greater conservatism and a lack of innovation (Stockwell, 2016), and therefore

may contribute to a view by employers that business degrees are all very similar.²⁰¹ This reduces the degree's ability to act as a signal.

Another difficulty is the considerable time it takes to design and validate a new degree, and to make updates, which may mean materials are not always current. This may cause businesses to see the content as largely irrelevant.

I argue that such regulatory practices can reduce signalling ability. These regulatory features are essentially created by the sector, often in the guise of "best practice", and therefore the sector could change them. If we do not address these issues, then the combination of this push towards sameness and slowness will continue to decrease the signalling ability of degrees.

Therefore it may be in the sector's interests to encourage much greater differentiation and uniqueness in degree design. I argue that without this the degree itself is limited to a tick box exercise, and will become increasingly irrelevant. This failure to differentiate may also exacerbate an instrumental approach to university study. If the employers treat the degree as a tick box exercise, then surely the students will follow suit.²⁰²

Option three: the logic of a national syllabus

Another option is to accept that degrees are not distinctive and take the view that consistency is more important than uniqueness. This fits with the notion of a dominant central canon established by experts, traditional to university study (BBC, 2011; University of Cambridge, 2019). It also saves employers the trouble of inspecting degrees, and to some extent ensures consumer consistency of experience. All parties would know what was (more or less) in every business degree. If so, then it would be logical to create a national business degree, rather than 150 versions of more-or-less the same degree, and at least reap the benefits of economic efficiency. From a signalling theory perspective, the creation of individual versions that are not sufficiently unique to inform a separating equilibrium is a waste of signalling cost.

However, consistency and standardisation are the enemies of signalling strength. If degrees cannot be used as quality differentiators, then other signals must be found and used. This case study illustrates how this is already happening with the importance of the second syllabus.

Communicating to students

Related to this is the thorny question of how honest policy makers and institutions should be about the job market and the link between degree study and employment.

²⁰¹ Instead employers often use the institution itself as a signal (AGR, 2016)– but that is different to the degree itself. This could be because it is competitive to get into elite universities and therefore the elite university has already done the signal sorting. Employers choose to focus on such institutions due to the endorsement signal of having been accepted into an elite institution.

²⁰² Some employers may object at the effort needed to unpick different degrees, but without differentiation they cannot work as a signal and therefore companies have to spend more on recruitment and selection.

Should the government be open about the fact that knowledge-based highly skilled roles have not necessarily increased and may not do so in the future (Brown, Hesketh and Williams, 2004; Brown, Lauder and Ashton, 2011; CIPD, 2017; Rothwell and Rothwell, 2017)? Many students imagine, understandably, that after university they will find a “graduate scheme”. But in fact the numbers dictate that 95% of students will not do so, though many may apply (High Fliers Research, 2018). Based on this case study their most likely experience of graduate schemes will be multiple rejections. Graduate schemes are almost irrelevant to the reality of post-graduation employment. Should policy makers and institutions clarify this?

If one is going to use an investment discourse in undergraduate education, is it not important to do so honestly? In particular, should it be emphasised that past performance is not an indication of future performance, that investments can go down as well as up, and that a return is not guaranteed? This is what is expected of independent financial advisers in other industries and where these warnings have not been given, industries have been accused of widespread miss-selling. Is this openness not a fundamental consumer right if one uses the human capital and investment lens in explaining the importance of higher education?

Furthermore, higher education is a most unusual investment as the rate of return is not the same for all. If one invests in shares in a company, then every shareholder gets exactly the same return in the form of a dividend in proportion to their investment. That is absolutely not the case with education. Depending on ability, effort, luck, motivation, background, connections, etc the “return” can vary widely across people doing the same course, let alone across different courses and institutions (Department for Education, 2017b). My question is, should this be made explicit to prospective students? Is it constructive to continue with the investment discourse and say, for example, if you are poor, white and male the chances of you finding a well-paid job are lower than for some other groups? In investment terms this may be true, and an investor deserves to know, but on the other hand is this not the very epitome of elitism and likely to only exacerbate positional conflict issues? Yet to not make this clear and suggest that each person on the same course has an equal chance of achieving a good “rate of return” is not correct and potentially significantly misleading. The whole discourse of investment starts to break down when these issues are considered.

Finally, there is much data available now on employment outcomes including highly skilled rates and average salaries across courses and institutions (Department for Education, 2017b; HESA, 2018b; UNISTATS, 2018b). Prospective students are encouraged to use this data to make “informed” decisions about what and where to study (OfS, 2019b). I argue that behind all of this is the implicit representation that there is a causal link between the university course under consideration and the employment outcomes. The data is presented in such a way that conflates causation and correlation. I argue that this misrepresents the impact of a degree on employment outcomes. The studying of a degree may have little causal effect on

future employment (Harvey, 2001; Holmes and Mayhew, 2016). This case study supports the possibility that what causes one to get a job offer is multi-factorial, and largely independent of the degree itself.

I argue that the current investment discourse is disingenuous and that perhaps students should be more truly informed about the nature of the market so they can decide what “signals” are worthwhile “investing” in for them. The employment data is published in accordance with government requirements, and universities must comply with this, but it would be interesting to see what would happen if the universities themselves, collectively, and as a sector committed to knowledge, research and the proper use of data, added an additional narrative. This narrative would be clear on the lack of proof of causation (Harvey, 2001), the issues with the demand side of labour (Brown, Cheung and Lauder, 2015), and the positional link with the rates of return (Lauder *et al.*, 2012).

Could the universities themselves help devise alternatives to university? Could this brutally honest narrative provide a way of emphasising the other benefits of university study, and de-couple it from employment outcomes and the dominance of the human capital paradigm? It may mean a decrease in the numbers attending university, but if there is an increasing number coming only for employment outcomes and these are not actually delivered by universities, could this not be an improvement to the integrity of the sector? And if we do not tackle this, is it not just a matter of time before the whole sector is caught up in a miss-selling scandal as we have seen in other industries such as banking, investment and insurance?

Alternatively, if the discourse is to remain focused on employment outcomes, then universities should consider what this means for the design of the learning experience. Ideas on this are discussed in the next section.

Design of the learning experience

The results of this case study provide a detailed insight into contemporary job-hunting. If one accepts that the role of the university includes helping graduates secure work, then the findings are a resource for ideas on how to re-design and enhance the student learning experience.

Mimicking job-hunting

Firstly, there is the nature of the overall learning experience. It is striking how very different the experience of job-hunting is to the experience of university study. This is because they are very different “sites” of experience (Marginson, 2016a). I propose that there are three sites of relevance. The university site, the transition to work site (ie job-hunting) and the eventual workplace. We are concerned with the first two, and I suggest that in many ways they are polar opposites.

The university year is highly structured with the syllabus, assessment details and dates set well in advance. Students know what they will experience when, how they will be assessed, and that they are entitled to comprehensive feedback. This

advanced planning and emphasis on feedback is standard practice, and with the impact of the CMA (2015) legislation is becoming a consumer right of students.

However, it is the exact opposite of the job-hunting experience, which is highly unpredictable, and may or may not include any feedback. There are no re-takes, extra time, or extensions. Often there is no human interaction at all. The findings show that applicants need to respond to the unexpected, often without clear instructions, and on very short timescales.

Furthermore, in the university learning experience the pass rates are high, and approximately 75% now achieve a 2:1 or higher (HESA, 2018b). Once again, this is the opposite of the job-hunting experience where the failure rate of individual applications is high, 92% for this particular case study.²⁰³

Resilience is needed, and an ability to navigate failure, the unexpected and the unclear. Universities may want to consider how they can build this into their student learning experience. This is a significant challenge as it would be seen as poor practice in the university site, but it is the reality of the transition site, at least based on the lived experience of these Participants.

Pedagogy and assessment

Secondly, universities could consider how the details of the selection activities shared by the Participants could be used to shape classroom activities. The teamwork exercises, for example, are not genuine collaborations but “performances” with assessors present throughout. Should this be reflected in group-work in the classroom? Presentations, role-plays, and rapid data analyses are also important and could make interesting (if challenging) learning exercises.

It is also essential to note the continued importance of the ability to express oneself through the traditional CV and interview. This means that the ability to articulate skills and experiences in writing and in person is crucial. This is a skill in itself. In securing that first post-graduation position being able to “talk the talk” is essential. Being able to “walk the walk” is not necessarily as critical.

An interesting question is whether the assessment methodology should be changed to include online tests typical of graduate schemes, and other assessment activities. One could argue that performing well in such tests are now core to “graduate-ness”, and therefore should feature in the degree curriculum.

Allocating responsibility

However, some of these suggestions could have a negative impact on student satisfaction. A real challenge for universities, and students themselves, is to make that mental shift from consumer while at university, to prospective employee while job-

²⁰³ A 2016 survey showed there were 68 applications per graduate scheme place, a 99% failure rate for such schemes (AGR, 2016)

hunting. This case study shows how brutal the job-hunting experience can be, and brutality is not something we would expect to see in a formal education experience.

The contrast between what is seen as a good learning experience and what is needed for the job-hunting experience is so strong that one cannot help but ask: Can we really expect universities to be good at preparing people for the university-work transition? They seem to be opposite realities, with sharply contrasting values and customs. This is not the natural area of expertise for universities.

As a society have we placed responsibility for graduate employment success in the wrong place?

This possibility is supported by the importance of work experience, internships, sandwich years and similar on employment outcomes (Mason, Williams and Cranmer, 2009; Purcell *et al.*, 2013; Andrews and Higson, 2014; Sanahuja Vélez and Ribes Giner, 2015). One of the best things a university could do to enhance employment prospects is to help students secure some sort of work experience while they are studying (High Fliers Research, 2016, 2019b; Trought, 2017). This means deliberately moving students out of the classroom and into the work place. The “employability magic” happens away from the traditional university classroom itself.

From a policy point of view does this mean that universities are simply the wrong tool for “employability”? Is it not economically inefficient to ask non-experts to prepare students for one of the most important stages of their lives? Should policy be reconsidered and tuition resource be reallocated in some way to recognise this?

Conclusion: A Zero Sum Game

Fundamentally I argue that graduate job-hunting is best understood as a Zero Sum Game. One graduate can only succeed in winning a job offer at the expense of another graduate failing (Brown, Lauder and Ashton, 2011; Brown, Lauder and Sung, 2015). Any effort to create an egalitarian and consistent learning experience with every student meeting minimum learning outcomes fails to acknowledge the competitive nature of the university-to-work transition. Paradoxically, such efforts actually make the degree a less useful signal for gaining employment.

Logic dictates that in order to win at this game, graduates and universities need to focus on relative competitiveness in job-hunting (Brown, Hesketh and Williams, 2003; Di Stasio, Bol and Van de Werfhorst, 2016). This may well be more important than academic performance or the knowledge and skills learnt in the classroom. Based on the results of this case study, competitive advantage during the crucial transition period is not going to come from the degree itself, and therefore needs to come from other sources. These could be tactical tips and tricks, the honing of job-hunting techniques, socio-economic status and behaviours, network connections, or personality traits. It also requires forming an elusive personal bond with the employer. Substantive work experience plays an important role – though by definition

this is generally not offered by the university itself. Examples of all these can be seen in the findings.

The second syllabus becomes of crucial importance, even though the discussion has also raised serious ethical questions on the extent to which universities should be helping graduates “play the job-hunting game” as it were.

In short, the individual university must aim to improve the chances of its students’ success at the expense of others. Other people’s failure is essential to their success. It therefore becomes counterproductive to share best practice on this, or aim to raise standards across the sector. Such behaviours would defeat the object, could even be seen as a betrayal of the institution’s own students^{clv}, and may only increase signalling costs. This does not sit easily with the image of the university as a place of knowledge generation and sharing.

The problem is that education for the purpose of interest in a subject can be provided to all without competitive harm. It is an uncongested good. Your enjoyment of learning about economics does not deplete mine. But education for the purpose of employment is a highly congested good, and as long as jobs vary in pay and status this will always be the case. This congestion will be particularly intense where there is low/no growth in highly skilled jobs (Brown, Hesketh and Williams, 2004; Brown, Lauder and Ashton, 2011; Cappelli, 2012). In this paradigm universities will be judged on the ability of their graduates to out-signal the competition.

In conclusion, this dissertation can be seen as another way of looking at the “higher education as a market” paradigm that dominates contemporary government policy (Molesworth, Scullion and Nixon, 2010; Lauder *et al.*, 2012; Brown, Cheung and Lauder, 2015; Naidoo and Williams, 2015; Tomlinson, 2018). The market discourse is often criticised by the academy, and many choose an alternative narrative of the purpose of university as knowledge for its own sake (Stockwell and Naidoo, 2017). The challenges and consequences of constructing the university experience as a market have been explored thoroughly elsewhere (Brown, Hesketh and Williams, 2004; Molesworth, Scullion and Nixon, 2010; Marginson, 2011; Naidoo and Williams, 2015; Tomlinson, 2018). Here we are looking at one aspect only, the reality of the job-hunting experience of recent business graduates, using the lens of signalling theory.

Appendices

Appendix 1 - Endnotes and Participant quotes protocol

The Endnotes are part of the data generated by this case study. They consist of Participant quotes that help evidence the statements and observations made in the main text.

All quotes have a unique code-number eg Pz.18#12, indicating the Participant's anonymised identification and the quote number of that Participant.

All quotes have been used once in either the main text or the endnotes. Further references to that quote are by cross reference eg see Pz.18#12.

All the quotes for any one participant can be seen grouped together in Appendix 3. The reader can therefore see all the quotes used for any one Participant.

Some references do not have a number eg Pz.18#. This means I have not used a quote but am simply referring to their transcript as a whole.

The code RTS# refers to me as the interviewer.

Where relevant I have included a company identification code in the quote code-number to indicate which company was being discussed eg Pz.18#11 (Co.7#). The companies are listed and described (but anonymised) in Appendix 6.

Appendix 2 - Tables

Table 1 shows Activities during studies. N=47 Participants.

Activities	Number
Internship	27
Work experience	20
Set up own business	8
Any work ie internship, work experience, or own business	40
Volunteered	21
Any work or volunteering	42

Table 2 shows the Activity at the time of phone survey or research interview. N=47 Participants.²⁰⁴

Activity	Number
Employed FT permanent.	25
Graduate scheme	4
Self-employed	4
Contractor	4
Employed PT	1
Intern	1
Studying	1
Studying and self-employed	1
Studying and employed	1

²⁰⁴ Note that all categories of participant experienced job applications. For instance, just because someone is currently self-employed or studying does not mean that s/he had not applied for jobs. This case study is about their overall job-hunting experience and therefore includes all their applications and not just their current activity.

Job-hunting	5
Total	47

Table 3 shows for each Participant how many job applications on average (Mean) required the various activities. It also shows the Range. N=47 Participants.

Activity	Mean	Range
Making a job application	40	0-390
Traditional techniques		
CVs	36	0-390
application forms	21	0-390
Interviews	7	0-30
Assessment activities		
Tests	6	0-50
Presentations	2	0-13
Written exercise	1	0-9
Teamwork	1	0-11
Assessment days	1	0-15
Any of above 5 activities	3	0-5
Other exercise	2	0-10
Job offers	3	0-12

Table 4 is a flowchart showing the typical journey of a Participant using data from Table

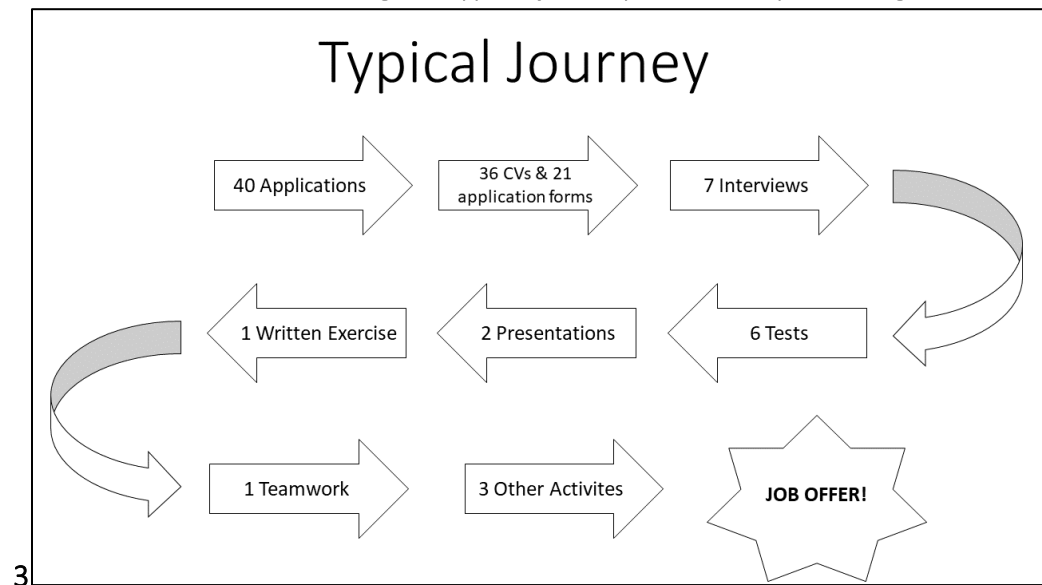


Table 5 shows how many Participants experienced the various activities both by Number and Percentage. In order of most to least. N=47 Participants.

Activity	Number	Percentage
CV/application form	43	91%
Interviews	42	89%
Job offers	42	89%
Tests	35	74%
Presentations	31	66%
Written exercise	24	51%
Assessment days	24	51%
Teamwork	20	43%
Any of above 5 activities	42	89%
An "other exercise" ²⁰⁵	39	83%

²⁰⁵ As other exercises are a combination of many different types of activity they have been put at the bottom of the tables despite appearing as a high percentage.

Table 6 shows the percentage of successful applications requiring activities. N=54 successful applications with sufficient data. The final column is the percentage of Participants that experienced the activity taken from Table 5 above where N=47 Participants.

	Number	Successful Applications Requiring	Cf Percentage Participants Experienced (Table 5)
CV/application form	46	85%	91%
Interview	46	85%	89%
Presentation	19	35%	66%
Test	13	24%	74%
Assessment day	12	22%	51%
Written exercise	11	20%	51%
Teamwork	9	17%	43%
Other exercise	29	54%	83%

Table 7 shows the difference in required activities between graduate schemes and general jobs, including the percentage of each. N=54 successful applications, N=8 Graduate and N=46 General.

	General	Graduate	General %	Graduate %
No. successful applications	46	8		
Interview	38	8	83%	100.00%
CV/application form	38	8	83%	100.00%
Presentation	11	8	24%	100.00%
Written exercise	8	3	17%	38%
Test	6	7	13%	88%
Teamwork	1	8	2%	100.00%
Assessment day	4	8	9%	100.00%
Other exercise	25	4	54%	50.00%

Table 8 shows asymmetric video exercises descriptions. N=19 Participants mentioned these but more may have experienced them as they were not specifically asked about.

ID code	Description. (Note these were often called video interviews by the Participants. Details provided vary.)
Pz.25#	Pz.25# had to do a video interview for his Master's application. He had two minutes to answer pre-recorded questions, recorded by a Cz.57# staff member. The questions were: What are your motivations for studying the course? Where do you see yourself in 5 years? Have you any experience of setting up your own business? Why did you choose to apply for the Entrepreneurship Master's Course? Why do you want to study for a Master's Qualification? Pz.25# noted he did not find the video interview process fine.
Pz.01#	Pz.01# did not do a video interview himself to get the role but Cz.49# now does them and he was asked to test them and give feedback. He found them awkward but possibly useful due to being time restricted.
Pz.02#	In his research interview he mentions an asymmetric video exercise in his Cz.52# application. He did not like it, because he could not build a rapport.
Pz.05#	Pz.05# said she experienced several video interviews and describes the one at Cz.30# as horrific.
Pz.07##	Pz.07## had to do video interviews for several applications. She said this was horrible. She had five seconds to prep an answer to a question and then had one attempt to answer it. Another video interview was recording herself answering questions and then sending this to the company. A positive of these interviews is that they are over quite quickly.
Pz.26#	Pz.26# said he had to do several video interviews and prefers human interaction over recorded interviews.

Pz.08#	<p>Pz.08# had to do a video interview and said this was a horrible experience. It was for the Cz.04# graduate scheme.</p> <p>The interviewee had to answer 10 questions that appeared on the screen. They had one minute to read each question and then 30 seconds – one minute to answer, depending on the question. If you went over your allocated time, the recording would cut you off.</p> <p>Pz.08# noted he looked on the internet for information from other applicants to the scheme who had shared their experiences. He gained some knowledge of the types of questions he would be asked from his research, for example, supply chain was a topic. But overall, the experience was very negative.</p>
Pz.27#	<p>Pz.27# had to do a video interview and flagged this an awful experience. Your responses are timed and if you don't finish answering in the allotted time the candidate is simply cut off by the recording.</p>
Pz.24#	<p>Pz.24# had to do two video interviews and noted these were quite a nerve-wracking experience. She was sent pre-set questions to record for both of her video interviews, and noted that the Cz.41# interview was very well formatted with questions around SWOT analysis.</p> <p>Pz.24# got through this stage of the interview for Cz.41#, but they then froze the recruitment for the role.</p>
Pz.28#	<p>Pz.28# had to do a video interview and noted this was a horrific experience. There is no chance to re-record your answers. She had 30 seconds to answer the questions that popped up on the screen and couldn't prepare for the interview properly as no pre-advice was sent from Cz.25#. There were 19 questions in the video interview.</p> <p>Through conducting her own internet research on Glass Door, Pz.28# was able to find some advice from other candidates who listed examples of the questions, but without this, she wouldn't have had any knowledge of the questions being asked. Pz.28# sat down with some other directors at Cz.25# in preparation for her video interview, who said they don't like them as there is no way to measure a candidate's interpersonal skills through them.</p> <p>Pz.28#'s mother works as a Director at the Cz.25# group, she personally does not use video interviews and chooses not to use them when interviewing graduates.</p> <p>Pz.28#'s mother noted that if a candidate doesn't feel that a video interview will show off their strengths, they can be proactive and contact Cz.25# and ask for a face to face interview.</p>

Pz.15#	Pz.15# had to do a video interview at the first round stage and noted this is a very daunting experience. Responses are timed so pressure is put on the applicants to respond quickly, allowing less time to think about their answers.
Pz.14#	Pz.14# had to record a video answering the question, 'tell us why you want the job?' for one job. It was attached to his application.
Pz.21#	Pz.21# mentioned doing a video interview for Cz.59#
Pz.17#	Pz.17# did a video interview for Cz.05#. It was an automated skype-like set-up. There was no-one on the other side of the interview when Pz.17# was recording his answers to questions, which he had two minutes to answer. It was well organised but an odd experience.
Pz.29#	For her Cz.29# interview, Pz.29# had to complete an asymmetric video interview. She found the experience bizarre. They were given a practice question before the recorded questions started, but it was unclear if the technology was working properly in her practice question and she ended up talking through the time given to prepare her answer before recording. So when recording started Pz.29# was very confused and this response was recorded. Luckily, this was a practice question, and therefore didn't count towards her final answer.
Pz.30#	Pz.30# attended a video interview where he had three minutes to answer each question before the recording cut-off. He was not sent the questions in advance. He would have preferred a more professional interview environment.
Pz.09#	<p>Pz.09# had to do a video interview and noted this experience was horrendous. The interviewer had pre-recorded their questions. They would pop on the screen for the recorded question, and then Pz.09# would have 15-20 seconds to think about how best to answer the question. At which, point his camera would switch on and he had two minutes to answer the question. If he didn't finish in time, it would cut out automatically. If he finished answering early, he could turn the recording off.</p> <p>Pz.09# noted this particular type of interviewing is incredibly difficult for candidates as you can't respond in relation to how your answers are being received by the interviewer. You also can't assess what details in your answer to further expand on as there's no one there in real time to have a conversation with. Video interviews are used frequently in graduate scheme application processes.</p>

Pz.31#	Pz.31# experienced video interviews and suggested more training be provided by Pinetree in order to prepare for them.
Pz.32#	Pz.32# was offered a video interview by an IT company, but having read unfavourable reviews of the company on Glass Door, he decided not to accept the interview offer.

Table 9 shows the range of different Types of other activities experienced in applications and the Number of applicants that experienced them. N=71 examples.

Type	Number
video interview	19
analysis exercise	16
internship or similar	15
role play	11
technical exercise	7
course	4
prioritisation task	3

(Note that some exercises fell into more than one type and therefore numbers do not add up to 71.)

Table 10 summarises details of the range of other activities described by Participants (not including videos or internships). N=37 examples.

ID Code	Description	code
Pz.21# (Cz.44#)	Create customer packages. Given employer's handbook with information, data and personas, asked to match packages to personas and then create new packages for customer personas. Individual, and not everyone given the same brief. Given two hours and told he would present it but did not present it. Instead each person was taken off for an interview at some points and presentation notes handed in.	a w
Pz.21# (unknown)	Money collection strategy. P given a brief describing a work-based situation specific to the company and a set of figure. Asked how he would approach structuring the collection of monies owed and what strategies he would use to achieve this goal. His answer needed to be 1-2 pages in length. P enjoyed this task and thought it was a smart way of mining graduates for their ideas and strategies.	a w
Pz.02# (Cz.62#)	Investment analysis. Based on a video and other information about the employer. Had to write recommendations on investment and then include in a teamwork exercise.	a p
Pz.02# (Cz.62#)	Case study analysis. Given a week in advance, part of a presentation as well as powerpoint slides, on opening a hospital in Africa.	a w p
Pz.04# (start-up Cz.10#)	Customer interaction role play. Made a pretend phone call, observed and then given feedback and asked to take on board information and adapt.	a r
Pz.07## (Cz.60#)	Staff disciplinary role play. Disciplining a faux staff member who was missing work and training, with observer, and preceded by a big analysis exercise as had to read a large amount of information on processes very rapidly.	a r
Pz.33# (Cz.06#)	Data analysis. Based on a mock work scenario given on the day.	a p
Pz.09# (Cz.07#)	Case study. Given a case study problem verbally, and then had to explain how he would solve it and grilled on his response. On managing customers and staff at tills in a	a r

	retail shop.	
Pz.09# (Cz.07#)	Data analysis. Given data in advance, had to interpret data, train a model on it, prepare a presentation with slides and a report on churn management for electricity supplier ie predict which customers would leave in the next 12 months, produce a report and slides, used as basis for forensic questioning in skype interview - the interviewer had read report very thoroughly.	a w p
Pz.09# (Cz.15#),	Data analysis. Given the topic a week in advance on Netflix and what data sets they'd have available and how they could be used. Prepared powerpoint slides and part of a 20 minute presentation.	a w p
Pz.32# (unknown co)	Excel exercise. Excel formula creation test around a data set.	a
Pz.13# (Cz.31#),	Sales strategy. Given data on one of their children's shows and asked to present on how to reach more children. He created powerpoint and did a lot of practice with TD ²⁰⁶ from Pinetree.	a w p
Pz.16# (Cz.70#)	Budget analysis. Given a budget to scrutinise on the day. About 5 mins to prepare, then asked about it during the interview with a panel of four.	a
Pz.17# (Cz.12#)	Sales pitch. Given 76 page job spec and asked to pitch services of the employer for recruiting this role, as if in a client interview. 5 minutes to prepare, then given feedback and further information and asked to do it again.	a p r
Pz.20# (Cz.06#),	Audience figures analysis. Given data and audience figures on the day, 20 minutes to prepare, then 5 minutes to present during interview. Knew there would be a task but not what it was nor that there would be a presentation.	a p
Pz.20# (Cz.21#)	Data analysis. Topic was how the NHS could get more people to be organ donors. Given a data set and client surveys a week in advance to prepare.	a p w
Pz.12# (Pinetree 2)	Customer interaction exercise. Role play during interview with presentation on answering typical questions of a customer.	r

²⁰⁶ Talent Development

Pz.19# (Cz.33#)	Grievance role play. Based on a grievance and how she would respond as a team leader. P acted it out with the real team leader pretending to be an employee.	r
Pz.20# (Cz.01#)	Authentic teaching demo. Mentoring session to 4 real students, 20 mins, given topic in advance.	r
Pz.02# (Cz.08#)	Customer interaction role play. During initial interview the interviewer pretended to be difficult customer to see how P would react. P did not know at the time.	r
Pz.22# (govt employment)	Teaching demo. Taught the interview panel how to shuffle cards.	r
Pz.02# (Cz.08#)	Authentic customer interaction role play Actually made calls to real candidates for head hunting firm, got feedback from observers, and tried to incorporate on the next call. A "try before you buy" exercise - followed by coffee with the team.	r
Pz.22# (roulette co)	Video demonstration. To show using the palette for roulette and speaking French. Related to past career.	r
Pz.20# (Cz.01#)	Prioritisation task. Given a set of emails that supposedly arrived Monday morning, prioritise and write responses. Also given 6-7 scenarios and had to write out how Participant would respond, handwritten.	pi w
Pz.13# (Cz.31#),	Prioritisation task. Given a set of tasks and had to rank them, based on managing an event at a venue.	pi
Pz.05# (Cz.53#)	Prioritisation task. As a group had to agree priority of a list of tasks for an event	pi
Pz.22# (govt employment)	Course. Attended an employability one week course in order to be able to sign on. On completion asked to apply as a tutor on the course.	c
Pz.34# (Cz.71#)	Course. Had to attend a training day where they tested his job suitability through capability exercises and checked if he would be comfortable in the business environment.	c
Pz.31# (Consultancy)	Course. 4 week training course and had to pass tests at the end to join the consultancy.	c
Pz.35# (Cz.72#)	Course. at regional training day	c p
Pz.04# (Cz.54#)	User experience test. Written answer responding to client brief for or a design.	t w

Pz.04# (unknown)	Software design task. For a client of the company, it was a technical drawing task.	t
Pz.04# (unknown)	Customer interaction exercise. P set an email-based task. She was tested on her tone of speech in email, when replying to a customer. This was for an operations customer support role.	t
Pz.04# (unknown)	App testing exercise. Test an app for faults prior to interview. P tried a two-side login process for a market place app.	t
Pz.05# (Pinetree)	Proof reading exercise	t
Pz.36# (Cz.73#)	Typing exercise	t
Pz.09# (Cz.32#)	Coding exercise. Sat with another employee to do a joint exercise. Had to bluff.	t

Codes: a = analysis exercise, c = course, p = presentation, pi = prioritisation exercise, r = role play, t = technical exercise, w = written presentation

Table 11 shows the percentage of Participants who mentioned using networking of some sort. N=47.

	Number	Percentage
used standard networking only	18	38%
used recruiter only	5	11%
used both	2	4%
used any	25	53%
Total participants	47	

Table 12 shows the percentage of research interview Participants who mentioned using networking of some sort. N=23.

	Number	Percentage
used standard networking only	15	65%
used recruiter only	3	13%
used both	2	9%
used any	20	87%
Total participants	23	

Table 13 shows the percentage of applications where networking was used (for those applications where sufficient data was collected) N=86 applications.

	N=86	used standard networking	used recruiter	% used networking
Total applications	86	31	8	45%
Total offers	54	24	8	59%
Total rejections	32	7	0	22%
General job applications	56	26	8	61%
General job offers	46	21	8	63%
General job rejections	10	5	0	50%
Grad scheme applications	30	5	0	17%
Grad scheme offers	8	3	0	38%
Grad scheme rejections	22	2	0	9%

Table 14 shows examples of declines and withdrawals. N=9 research interviewees mentioned these for N=10 applications (one Participant declined two offers).

ID Code	Company	Reason
Pz.07##	Cz.17#	declined offer as had another offer
Pz.02#	Cz.62#	declined offer as it didn't start for months and got a quicker start with Cz.08#
Pz.08#	Cz.38#	declined offer as pay not what recruiter had said
Pz.13#	Unknown client facing co	declined offer as found better agency work in hospitality where he could control his time more and continue hunting for a graduate job
Pz.14#	Unknown marketing co	declined offer due to pay
Pz.02#	Cz.52#	withdrew as already had 2 job offers
Pz.09#	Cz.07#	withdrew at final stage - close to offer as discussing salary, had another offer
Pz.11#	Cz.58#	withdrew after 1st interview, turned down 2nd interview, poor cultural fit (company not "cool")
Pz.16#	Unknown company	withdrew after two promising interviews, poor cultural fit (company rude)
Pz.18#	Cz.28#	withdrew in early stages, not serious about application more curious, not really a company she wanted to work for

Table 15 Quotes describing topics for presentation exercises from research interviewees.

ID Code	Quote
Pz.01#31	<i>(Cz.49#) so two interviewers and myself, make a personal presentation and the subject was on a company that inspired you and how you think you help them improve themselves.</i>
Pz.20#12	<i>(Cz.06#) So the task was not one that I prepared or was able to prepare for because you're given it in the interview and that was you were given some audience figures and some other data and asked...and told you're in a situation where you've just been given all this data and you've got twenty minutes to summarise and present back the key facts.</i>
Pz.11#8	<i>(Cz.16#) they asked me to come back and do a presentation on like I think they gave me like a toaster and I had to launch it in the UK and how I would do that, so from...if I would go to retail, if I would go through social media, what was my whole kind of launch campaign, so I had to do a presentation on that.</i>
Pz.11#9	<i>(Cz.09#) For that they wanted me to do a presentation and this was going to be on a social media campaign that really caught my eye and why and kind of present that back to them.</i>
Pz.09#13	<i>(Cz.15#) [there] was a presentation which I had to prepare on Netflix talking about the datasets that Netflix would have available to them and it was really quite general and the types of problems that you might be able to solve with these datasets for Netflix as a business and then the methodology that I would use and kind of the approach that I would use. So that was the presentation that I had to deliver.</i>
Pz.09#14	<i>(other applications) that was slightly different to a lot of the other data science presentations that I've had to deliver in interviews, a lot of the others they give you a dataset and say, we're interested in trying to predict which customers are going to leave us, can you do this and then you come back and deliver, show them your code, show them why you made the decisions you made and then kind of show them the results.</i>
Pz.09#15	<i>(Cz.32#) we had to talk about what online retail would look like in 2025, which I believe at the time was in ten years' time, so again quite vague actually, you know a lot of scope to go wherever you want with it.</i>
Pz.05#16	<i>(Pinetree) so I had to write a marketing plan, come up with a bit of a social media plan, um, everything that would be involved in a campaign basically, um and present that to, um, the two interviewers.</i>
Pz.07##32	<i>(Cz.43#) half of it was, like, how do you improve life for colleagues and the other side how to improve it for customers and you had to come with your ideas of how Cz.43# could change that and then you presented to one person.</i>

Pz.20#13	<i>(Cz.21#) the NHS is trying to convince people to become organ donors, here are some data about people's perceptions about organ donation and other things and just talk about the barriers and what I recommend the NHS do in order to overcome these and it was a real set of client questions that they've had like years ago and that was actually really, really interesting and I enjoyed the task.</i>
Pz.13#12	<i>(Cz.31#) So I basically did a competitor analysis, I just did a slide show with pictures, I tried to make it very child-like so that it would fit the Cz.31# theme and I actually enjoyed that ... So I just did a competitor analysis, I picked Disney and Cz.31# and then I did a few extra bits at the end, oh and at the end I did come up with a product service idea that they could implement if they wanted to.</i>
Pz.13#13	<i>(Cz.31#) they wanted all the candidates to prepare a presentation so it was on one of their shows called Blaze and the Monster Machines and they basically wanted us to find a new way to break the show into the market to reach new children and how they could evolve it. So I spent a month working on that for the day. I added a PowerPoint.</i>
Pz.11#10	<i>(Cz.16# 1) oh yeah they said, they would like you to go to the next round so...which was to put together a one page Word document or one slide PowerPoint presentation on a content strategy for one of our products so it was for their cord-free, I think their new cord-free at the time. So that was interesting because a content strategy to me is a detailed document about how we're going to launch a product but they wanted a very concise, one page, one slide... so really concise which I was umming and ahing about but I think stats are quite important for strategy so I think they wanted to see like selling X amount by X date and things like that so I put that together and they sent it through.</i>

Appendix 3 - Participants quotes

Table of Participant Quotes

ID Pz.01#.....	197
ID Pz.02#.....	202
ID Pz.03#.....	209
ID Pz.04#.....	211
ID Pz.05#.....	213
ID Pz.06#.....	216
ID Pz.07##.....	218
ID Pz.08#.....	225
ID Pz.09#.....	227
ID Pz.10#.....	231
ID Pz.11#.....	233
ID Pz.12#.....	235
ID Pz.13#.....	237
ID Pz.14#.....	239
ID Pz.15#.....	243
ID Pz.16#.....	246
ID Pz.17#.....	247
ID Pz.18#.....	251
ID Pz.19#.....	254
ID Pz.20#.....	256
ID Pz.21#.....	260
ID Pz.22#.....	263
ID Pz.23#.....	264

ID Pz.01#

- Pz.01#1 Pz.01# (Cz.49#) *I definitely like the presentations – this is probably just personal preference*
- Pz.01#2 Pz.01# *Am I going to honestly sit there and really aggressively fight with a bunch of graduate adults about who should be coming off an island? For me I just kind of, I just thought oh this somewhat patronising, I get really irritable with those kinds of assessments, give me something real and then you'll get the real me.*
- Pz.01#3 Pz.01# (Cz.49#) *I would assume the first group test we did was, you know how do we engage with one another, convey our points, you know communicate with concision but at the same time have enough depth behind your argument as to why you think somebody should be moved on this island and probably to a degree how hard are you at putting it across, are you too nasty or are you too nice...*
- Pz.01#4 Pz.01# (Cz.49#)... *because it's time bound maybe it makes it more fair... you can't milk through being charming or interesting, [with] an extra bit of time to try and impress.*
- Pz.01#5 Pz.01# (Cz.49#) *if they liked the sound of you went to [phone] interview first, which was not something I was used to and we were told to prepare for a series of questions. I still use it to this day when I'm being asked about stuff using the STAR methodology, so situation...what situation you were in, what the task was, how you actioned it and what was the result. So name a time you've been a leader in a team, name a time you've been innovative, kind of approach and we'd use that STAR methodology. Did the telephone interview, passed with flying colours – they told me there and then, okay we'll proceed you on to the next stage.*
- Pz.01#6 Pz.01# (Cz.49#) *if you're going to do it, do it in the interview. Be...*
RTS# *Be individual, you mean?*
Pz.01# *Yes because... then you're being asked why do you want to work for Cz.49#, why do you want to do this and that side of you can then come out and you can be yourself... if you get there and you're genuinely 'passionate' about the job then you'll be seen... so when you get to the interview and they ask you questions you should be going over time, or at least be trying – not consciously – minded I was meant to be there fifteen minutes I was there forty-five... Everybody thought I'd been abducted or something and I said, no we got in a really good conversation, that's how it should be.*

- Pz.01#7 Pz.01# *You do find yourself in the group work, you're having to suddenly be really careful because you can't be seen as that dominating force and you can't be seen as that...maybe as loud as you were in the interview...*
- Pz.01#8 Pz.01# (Cz.20#) *[my final dissertation] I did it on Cz.20# and I did it purposely because I wanted an 'in' with some contacts that this very connected business school often has and I was trying to use that as a vehicle... I managed to go and see one of their client directors, presented what I was thinking and she was really, really keen and said 'I think you'd thrive at Cz.20#'. So naturally I was all a bit excitable and thought, 'yeah this sounds good'.*
- Pz.01#9 Pz.01# (Cz.49#) *but at the same time I could imagine if you'd had a really smoking hot good telephone conversation and then you failed on an online test, which I know does happen... yeah that would probably hurt a little more then...*
 RTS# *Because it's more personal?*
 Pz.01# *Yeah... you've built a connection... you don't feel quite as much a number by that stage, you know you've had communication, it feels like the door's a little more open and then an online test smacks you down which is completely in the opposite way.*
- Pz.01#10 Pz.01# (Cz.20#) *I can remember calling my mum and saying, oh how am I ever going to get a job because for all the knowledge and my First class degree and my paper that's done this, that and the other, I can just never get past these flippin' tests! Hateful things.*
- Pz.01#11 Pz.01# (Cz.49#) *we ended up with these bits of paper with sort of almost Lego block items, trying to figure out which way they were going to go in and I decided to, right these are falling apart so I'm going to Sellotape them all together and at the end of the assessment... one of the women who was running the assessment said, 'you stuck all these together', and I thought 'oh god what have I done now' because it was either, this is different or you've just made my life really hard and she didn't, she said 'you know nobody's ever done that, really interesting point' so I kind of wiped my head, said 'oh thank goodness for that'.*
- Pz.01#12 Pz.01# (Cz.49#) *I think that came up, name a weakness of yours and I think you have to be quite careful on those, you know...humility and honesty but don't say you're rubbish at the same time and where you'd be willing to improve.*
- Pz.01#13 Pz.01# (Cz.49#) *In terms of how I intended to behave, I remember even having a tactical discussion with my best mate on this one, as a character I may be more overt and louder than others but thought, temper it, don't be that person... be somebody they remember but not in a 'oh god, I remember him' adverse way. Temper it, I think was the way to do it.*

- Pz.01#14 Pz.01# (Cz.20#) *I understand – and again a company like Cz.20# probably has to be quite rigid and, not to sound sour about it because I’m not – the only thing I would say is... it doesn’t represent you... they don’t even get to understand who you are and what you can bring to the party because in all of that language, numerical, logical reasoning... at no point did I get a chance to talk about why I’m vehement about artificial intelligence, why I loved Pz.68# and what I wanted to do with it.*
- Pz.01#15 Pz.01# (Cz.20#) *[the process] doesn’t allow for any of that [expression of passion] and maybe when you’re dealing with their application numbers they just simply can’t afford to but I would encourage any of them to try and understand, especially when they’ve got a big AI program that can understand words, if it’s screening those... personal statements, [it’s their passion] that I want to hear.*
- Pz.01#16 Pz.01# (Cz.20#) *there is something more to a person behind those assessments, far more, and they could miss out on you know, big potential.*
- Pz.01#17 Pz.01# (Cz.49#) *I think that was definitely one element that I did quite well in my presentation... they gave an overview... about what the organisation is, what they’re looking for, and I picked up some of the... tell tale signs that they were saying about the firm... and I remember incorporating that into my strategy that I was proposing which instantly made the guy smile and said yes, you were clearly listening*
- Pz.01#18 Pz.01# *I just get really fed up... I understand why you have to talk about how you’d get people off an island but we’re not really there to discuss that.*
- Pz.01#19 Pz.01# (Cz.49#) *I recall them asking the group and the brave were going to stand up and say their piece, again you had to respectfully chip in probably but not be the one who was pushy, a degree of humility I think probably helped [laughs]*
- Pz.01#20 Pz.01# *I remember going smart, double-breasted suit as always... especially for a company...I think you choose your company, again you know what culture you’re going into. If you’re going in to you know Cz.67# or Cz.69# where they just don’t wear suits maybe you’ll look slightly out of place and it does send signals, it definitely sends signals, but in Cz.49#, you know consultancy firm I expected suited and booted was the way to go and I was right.*
- Pz.01#21 Pz.01# (Cz.49#) *It’s a very tough market, there’s no doubt about it and I...you know more and more I feel – and the way I got through Cz.49# is – you have to try and inject your personality into that big, big ether because, yes, no matter who thinks you’re great at university or even if you feel like,*

'god I really could do that job and I know I could do it and I'd be brilliant at it', at that first contact you are just in a sea of other people and it's really difficult.

- Pz.01#22 Pz.01# *[LinkedIn is] a great tool for tracking what you're doing. You know, you have internal Cz.49# CV, you've got your external facing CV and it's a right pain trying to coordinate everything so I treat my LinkedIn as... my central repository. At least I know what I've been up to and it's telling the world so I've always got that benchmark.*
- Pz.01#23 Pz.01# *LinkedIn is useful again because... it understands what you're looking for. I didn't use it so much when I was going for my graduate job, what I do use it for now is... [to] build up my profile as I do some really cool projects and build up a reputation for myself... I used to panic so friends of mine were in work and say, 'oh I always hit up on LinkedIn' and I'm thinking, 'oh god why am I not getting touched' – now I've built up the profile and I've got experience, now I'm being contacted.*
- Pz.01#24 Pz.01# *If you're on LinkedIn and you're doing a good job and you're feeding that profile, don't worry, you're going to get people contacting you and the system's going to understand what you're up to.*
- Pz.01#25 Pz.01# (Cz.49#) *incidentally it was actually an advert that the career adviser here had spotted... she just said, do you know what, considering what you're looking to go into... this maybe looks like a good piece for you, 'change the world and the government'.*
- Pz.01#26 Pz.01# (Cz.20#) *...and after that I just was saying, you know 'can I please get the application in, can you help me through it', and they take a very hands off approach, started connecting me to other individuals who again just don't give you much time...*
- Pz.01#27 Pz.01# (Cz.20#) *So when I applied for the Cz.20# role I remember it saying... 'how did you come about this job' and I ticked off on the list 'recommended by somebody who works internally' and it said 'who's the name' so I put her name down – because again it kind of sold you the dream of you know, 'I'm here so don't you worry, it'll all be brushed under the carpet', and then you do the psychometric test and it's an absolute car crash*
- Pz.01#28 Pz.01# (Cz.20#) *...and then I went back and said, oh you know 'I've had this really bad result but I'd still like to be part of the firm, is there anything you can do', and they just switch off, done*
RTS# *What do you mean, switched off?*
Pz.01# *I didn't get anything from her after that*
- Pz.01#29 Pz.01# (Cz.49#) *So six didn't even acknowledge my existence... three I had brute force hard psychometric testing, online testing, didn't pass them,*

they were nasty, so I didn't even get through that stage, and then Cz.49# was the one I went all the way through and even managed to get to speak to somebody

- Pz.01#30 Pz.01# (Cz.49#) I definitely liked the fact that it was a telephone conversation first because I just felt, oh at least it gives me that opportunity to get across to them that I'm keen and ambitious and that I love [technology], in the hope that yes they might be a little more understanding if the online assessment's a bit trashy*
- Pz.01#31 Pz.01# (Cz.49#) so two interviewers and myself, make a personal presentation and the subject was on a company that inspired you and how you think you help them improve themselves,*
- Pz.01#32 Pz.01# at the end of the assessment they would challenge you to say what do you think could have gone better so they'd start asking you questions, so it wasn't...I feel it wasn't just a case of they were watching you in the assessment, it was then how would you reflect upon it. I suspect they were still marking at that point.*
- Pz.01#33 Pz.01# (Cz.49#) I must admit, comparatively to a phone call... you feel quite fake. I mean everyone's got to be on their best behaviour in a telephone conversation but it's just that additional layer of...you know, you're watching your face move about, you want to look good but at the same time you just need to concentrate on what it is you're saying...you feel more like you're a Cz.06# presenter rather than somebody having a genuine conversation*
- Pz.01#34 Pz.01# (Cz.49#) and again maybe they're being, maybe it's purposely difficult, they're trying to get...maximise their chances of finding the best talent but it does, it felt a bit clunky, I think is the way to put it*
- Pz.01#35 Pz.01# when you go in at that graduate level, your personal statement might be a bit longer because... you've not got that work profile history so you fill up that page instead... so that is when you start padding out, you know I hit the cultural values of the company in this way, even if you're doing it subtly...*
- Pz.01#36 Pz.01# again be different... it's not a guarantee being different is going to get you a job but my word it makes it so much easier to have something ready to say. 'Where did you study, University of Hertfordshire', 'Where did you go to university, well I didn't actually, I went to business school, oh' and it just instantly changes the tone of the conversation... even now I talk to people about that and they still go, oh wow that's different. So don't follow the way it always has to be, there's so many different ways...*
- Pz.01#37 Pz.01# At the time I felt quite happy because...well not happy but I thought I'm beating the odds because I remember individuals at university saying*

to me, oh you'll take thirty or forty applications so when I did it in ten I thought, right well I'm ahead of the trend so not too bad. Yeah it's pretty rough when they don't even acknowledge your existence but then you still get emails later on because you're on some subscription list thing, oh would you like to apply for this and you just think, pah please, they're not even looking, they're really not even looking.

ID Pz.02#

- Pz.02#1 Pz.02# (Cz.51#) I mean, I was rubbish at public speaking when I first came into Pinetree, I hated it, hated doing presentations, now I can so it really helped.*
- Pz.02#2 Pz.02# (Cz.51#) you would present your ideas to everyone in the group and you would essentially be fighting for where the money should be invested.*
- Pz.02#3 Pz.02# (Cz.52#) I did not like it!
RTS# why not?
Pz.02# I couldn't build a rapport with the machine!
RTS# so how did you handle it?
Pz.02# I just tried to do it the exact same way that I would do any other interview ... I answered it in a very, I guess, laid back kind of way...I just sat there and did it as I would be speaking to anyone and essentially I had my fiancée sitting on the other side of the computer, so I was just talking to her.*
- Pz.02#4 Pz.02# (Cz.08#) Probably the hardest interview I've ever had in my life. I generally think I'm quite good at reading people. This guy, he's my Co.65# manager now, but was just the hardest person to read, I could not tell what he was thinking. Any small talk just didn't pan out.
RTS# Ah, so your normal strategy of ice-breaking didn't work
Pz.02# No, I tried everything, tried a bit of intellectual conversation, no it was just palmed off. There was a reason behind, he had his own strategy for doing it because he's not like that normally but he said in the kind of work that we're in you sometimes get really difficult candidates, you get really difficult clients as well and a lot of them are like that so he acted like one of the most difficult clients that he's ever had and wanted to see how I dealt with it.
RTS# Oh, so it was a test?
Pz.02# Yeah*

- Pz.02#5 *RTS# You haven't mentioned anywhere in any of these that they were interested in your grades or anything like that.*
Pz.02#(Cz.08#) I think the only one that was important there was I have a personal training certificate and I did physio... I know that he was looking for people that are not just academic and people that are not just work, they're looking for a good mix of both and the fact that I had that and I had it on my CV I think helped.
- Pz.02#6 *Pz.02# (Cz.08#) I work quite closely with the director at Cz.08# and he does all the hiring and he always looks at the degree, if they have a good degree, if they have a 2:1, if it was from a good university then fine, that's how you essentially get through to interview stage. That coupled with any previous experience that you've had, I think in the role that they are looking for in a consultant position they are looking for someone that has jumped out of their comfort zone, I guess, so have been travelling, had various roles, you know, done an internship, not just finished university and then laid around and not really done much until something fell in their lap.*
- Pz.02#7 *Pz.02# (Cz.51#) You are all part of the same team so they just wanted to see your approach to it. Mine was listening to what everyone wanted to say and then counteracting all the arguments rather than just pushing mine, which is what a lot of them did.*
RTS# A lot of them did the same as you?
Pz.02# No, they just pushed their idea and didn't really listen to anyone else
RTS# So why did you do that?
Pz.02# Because that's what they wanted
RTS# That's what you thought Cz.51# would want?
Pz.02# Yes.
- Pz.02#8 *Pz.02# (Cz.08#) He brought me in to the office [for] a test day where they put you on the phones, they'll bring up a list of the people that have applied through Monster or wherever, get you to call them. They give you a set paper of all the information that you need to get from this person and, I mean, pretty much if you don't get anything then you haven't got the role; if you missed out one or two or three then, you know, one of the managers would come up to you and say 'okay this is what you're doing, this is what you need to do a bit better, try again'. If you're getting the same result every time then you've probably not got the role but if you're at least showing that you are listening to what they're saying, learning and using the advice that they're giving you on the next call, then you've got the role.*
RTS# So, these people that you were calling, were they real candidates?
Pz.02# Yes.

RTS#... Okay, I'm just trying to envisage this, so you were in a kind of mini call centre type thing, you've got a script

Pz.02# Yeah, you've got a piece of paper in front of you, you've got a phone, you've got I guess the numbers on your screen in front of you and you then you just go through

RTS# And this guy is watching you?

Pz.02# Yeah, I mean there are three main managers there, there is one managing director, two directors, and three senior managers. Any one of them would be listening from anywhere in the office and once you've finished the call they'll come up and tell you, you know, what you can do better, what went well, and then see if you apply it to the next call

Pz.02#9 Pz.02# (Cz.51#) There was a competency-based interview, which for that I would say anyone could get through a competency-based interview because you just need to know what to say and you would say it. Your motivations for getting the role, whether you liked the role, don't play a real factor in it, it's more... of a screening interview than anything else. And then going along with that they were trying to get to know me and my personality and whether I would fit with the team. I would say that was the important bit.

Pz.02#10 Pz.02# I'll actively try and make more small talk with whoever I'm interviewing with just to ease up the conversation and essentially act as an icebreaker so when we actually get to the interview it works more as a free-flowing conversation rather than question and answer which, you know, is what I prefer and is what I would like when I was interviewing people. When I do interview people what I prefer [is] people that I really... actually like. So people in some sense that you can say, 'yeah I really got along with that person, I can see myself working with them', then you're in for a good chance.

Pz.02#11 RTS# And so what happened....?

Pz.02# (Cz.51#) We went with naval, the one that I wanted, yeah.

RTS# So even though you weren't pushing through your idea particularly you did actually...[win]

Pz.02# Yeah I did it more passively so I let them fight it out to begin with and at that point they had already got rid of space and they had some really rubbish reasoning behind it which I didn't really understand... I wasn't going to argue because I didn't want it anyway, so I let them get rid of that. I was asking questions as I went along just to show I was still engaged and not just sitting back... asking questions and prodding and I guess that was the only other time I would say it was a bit underhanded what I was doing, because I would purposely ask questions to pit different teams against each other without really saying what I was going for. Though not saying that I was going for naval but saying 'why do you think

the air and defence would be better than, you know, helping the army' and then the two that had chosen it would just be like 'well I think it's this'. One of them would go and then all I would need to do is pitch naval and no-one else had been talking about naval but I'd know everything that I need to know about why air and defence is not good enough or why space isn't good enough so in the end it came down to air and defence and naval so all I did was reinstate all the negatives that the other guys in the team had said about air and defence and, you know, that way I really had a team supporting me and then we got rid of air and defence and then I pitched naval...

Pz.02#12 Pz.02# (Cz.51#) They told me all the factors that they wanted... listening, selling your idea, influencing, persuasion and then getting buy-in. So they didn't tell me how to do it but they told me what the five points [were] that they wanted and it was easy to put everything into place when I did it.

Pz.02#13 Pz.02# I found the people, I found the decision-makers for the roles and got in touch with them... if HR have a role you just go straight past HR and go straight to the hiring manager so that HR will be cut out of the process...

Pz.02#14 Pz.02# I always keep a tie with me but I never really wear it... Just in case. Just in case I walk in and everyone is wearing a tie. I'd want to be in a tie...

*Pz.02#15 Pz.02# (Cz.08#) I think one [thing] he said he liked [was] the preparation that I had. So I had a book full of notes and I was making notes as the interview went along
RTS# This is the very first interview ...
Pz.02# Yes. Taking notes as I went along and then to flip the page I had a page-long list of questions that I wanted to ask anyway
RTS# And why had you done that?
Pz.02# No real reason, I just wanted to show that I wanted to ask questions. I tell my brother the same thing, I was like 'it doesn't matter if you don't have questions to ask but you always want to ask questions just to show that you are interested'... so I would say most of those questions I didn't really care what the answer would be, it wouldn't have made a difference in my decision making, I was just going to ask those questions, so that was one of things that he said, I like the fact that you came prepared with questions.*

*Pz.02#16 Pz.02# I'll make it a point to go on to LinkedIn and find the hiring manager. Whether I look at his profile or not doesn't really make a difference, only that he gets the notification that I have looked at his profile.
RTS# Oh, right! Now, why, tell me why
Pz.02# It gives them the impression that I'm being proactive and that I'm*

doing my research even though I may not be. I guess that's more of a political aspect of the whole recruitment process.

- Pz.02#17 Pz.02# (Cz.25#) So, for example, back in the first year we met... [a senior staff member] from Cz.25#. I was actually speaking to him a couple of months ago back in January...I just saw him pop up on LinkedIn so I sent him a quick message just to see how he was doing. He said that all was going well and we should catch up soon.*
RTS# So why did you do that?
Pz.02# Just because he was there. Why not, why wouldn't I? And I guess, looking deeper into it, he's a, I guess, a good player to have in the market if I was looking for anything else... And I guess part of that was I got along with [him] when he was here anyway, so nice to connect.
- Pz.02#18 Pz.02# I wanted to be that person that was remembered, not by HR but by the person that is actually looking to fill the role and I guess I wanted to have more interaction with them as well through the process because I think company culture was quite big for me*
- Pz.02#19 Pz.02# (Big Pine Australia) they're things that I picked up from university... it was actually [one of the lecturers] that taught me the whole thing indirectly. So when I got the role or the internship with Big Pine which then turned into a role later on after the internship, [the lecturer] reached out directly to the VP of Australasia in Big Pine and then got [me] the role that way.*
- Pz.02#20 Pz.02# (Cz.51#) I guess I was cheating a bit. I went to a careers fair ... and I saw the Cz.51# stand... so I went and I was talking to the guys and I was asking them about the whole interview process so they were letting me know like how it is. We connected on LinkedIn so ... I just dropped a quick message saying that I'm going in for the interview, any tips you can give? And then they just told me like this is what it'll be like, this is what they're looking for... they knew my dad, they had worked with him on a few projects so we began talking that way and, like I said, I am just the kind of guy who will just go up and talk to people just for the sake of it which is why even in my third year [at Pinetree] I still knew all the first years because I just talk but, yeah... they told me exactly what they were looking for there and how they got it. And you'll get a lot of people who say 'but you cheated' but no I didn't.*
- Pz.02#21 Pz.02# If someone applied directly, blindly, and I was putting someone into a process [as a recruiter], the guy that I put into the process would have a clear idea of exactly what the hiring manager is looking for because I have told him and that's not considered cheating so I don't know why this would be. If I've gone out there and done extra work just to, you know,*

figure out not just blindly stabbing in the dark trying to, you know, hope that I'd made an impression, then it's fair game .

- Pz.02#22 *Pz.02# I think networking is really important, no matter what they're looking to get into. People from all aspects of life. You know, an HR manager in one particular firm that knows a hiring manager somewhere else, you know that helps but you wouldn't necessarily know that that's the case. So networking is key at any point. There is something that we have, it's not an elevator pitch but it's like you can talk to someone in an elevator and by the time you get to your floor you could have a new job.*
- Pz.02#23 *Pz.02# So I think ultimately if you were hiring for a role and you don't really know who's in HR and they came to you with a CV and said, look I've got this person, all you're seeing is black and white writing on a piece of paper but if that was my CV and you had some interaction with me as well at least, you know, you might be able to visualise what's on that piece of paper.*
- Pz.02#24 *Pz.02# I would have to talk to them all individually to begin with. Before I could figure out what job they would want, I would need to figure out what they want.*
- Pz.02#25 *Pz.02# (Cz.34#) I sent my recommendation letter to him [from another Big Pine internship] ...he took a look at it and said it's really good that you've made such an impact in your six weeks of being there. I have a role coming up at Cz.34# and wanted to know if you'd be interested in hearing more about it. [He had also done an internship with Cz.34#]*
- Pz.02#26 *Pz.02# I mean generally I don't wear a tie just to give off a more relaxed approach so, coming in, it makes the interview a bit less stringent.*
- Pz.02#27 *Pz.02# (Cz.51#) I've always been the person that will put minimal writing on the slides. I just use that as hints and tips on the slides for me, not really for the other person, so the other person would look at the slide, not see much, look at me and then be engaged in what I'm saying.
RTS# Whereas if you put lots of stuff up they'd be looking at the slide, yes that's clever.
Pz.02# Something I learned from here as well!*
- Pz.02#28 *Pz.02# (Cz.08# and others) I mean I went through a recruiter so I didn't really apply, they just set up interviews for me.*
- Pz.02#29 *Pz.02# (Cz.51#) That was one that I did a lot of prep for beforehand to know exactly what they do.
RTS# So even though your dad works there you still did a lot of prep?
Pz.02# Yeah, my dad works on the engineering side and if I was going to legal then I would go into all areas of the business so I would be working with I guess engineering, with the naval unit, with whoever else depending*

on the bids and projects that they have.

Quote continues:

Pz.02# You get a few people that will be 'isn't that cheating?' but of course it's not.

RTS# What do you see it as?

Pz.02# Just being smart, I guess. Why wouldn't I want to go in there with as much information as I had?

RTS# So you see it as prep?

Pz.02# Yeah, essentially if I knew what they were looking for, that's why recruiters are there in the first place

Pz.02#30 Pz.02# (Pinetree) (Cz.08#) You get people that haven't done any prep at all and they would come through and they would talk and they would be like 'why do you want to do L'Oreal'? And they would be like 'I really want to do cosmetics' but that's not really what I want to be hearing because that's not what your role would be. You're not going to be selling cosmetics. And then you get others that would come in and they just know what the degree and the job description is inside out and they will tell you 'I want to do it because I like marketing', and 'I like marketing' and the fact that they have an interest in the cosmetics industry just acts as a massive plus and like, well that's the answer I want to hear and now you've made me think that you'd be quite good for this role and if they have good marks in the group exercise that we do then by means just show that they are quite clued-up and whether the other person that came in first said 'but I didn't want to do any research because I wanted to make it fair for everyone else there', I don't care because I want the best person for it. If you go to L'Oreal you're going to be representing Pinetree just like if I put someone into a process with GSK they will be representing me and they'll be representing Cz.08# so I'm not going to put anyone who hasn't prepared enough.

Pz.02#31 Pz.02# I'm not going to push someone into a job because it's worked for me and it goes on the basis on my personal training as well, everyone's body is different. If I kept giving everyone the same programme eventually it's not going to work for someone and they're going to pick up on it so I would sit down with them like this, we need to figure out what they want, what they are interested in, and at least give them the choice to do one or two. So for me I was interested in marketing and accounting – I did both of them – I figured out I liked marketing more and stuck with it. So if someone has an interest in law and someone has an interest in something else then I would recommend that they try it at least once, at least through an internship.

ID Pz.03#

- Pz.03#1 Pz.03# (Cz.26#) *it was more about kind of your decision making ability and morality and ethics, that type of test and what would you do in this scenario.*
- Pz.03#2 Pz.03# *It is sad that that is the case, that you spend so much time working on a degree and it's almost a route [sic] of passage...and... in interviews if that isn't brought up at all then it's...in some ways surprising as well that they wouldn't focus on that, even getting a few minutes ... to talk about the degree and what you learnt.*
- Pz.03#3 Pz.03# (Pinetree) *one thing which I've always thought... is that it's a really positive because of the way which Pinetree is set up and the experiences that you get are so different to other universities, it really gives you that edge because you always have something to talk about in interview... I have a wealth of things I could have talked about all the industry days that we did... the hackathon that I organised and ran... and there was some really interesting stuff that I did with the internships and the projects I worked on, so all of that and even Pinetree as an idea and a concept is fascinating because if you talk about they're always really interesting, they go 'oh I've not heard of that' and 'I've never come across Pinetree' but they've normally heard about Big Pine and then they're putting two and two together and they're fascinated that you're actually studying within Big Pine's premises and you're getting that exposure to business so it's a really interesting thing to talk about*
- Pz.03#4 Pz.03# [students] *don't know where to start, don't know where to look, not really sure also about the opportunities out there, the breadth of opportunities because you're mainly just exposed to your own circle of friends and... family*
- Pz.03#5 Pz.03# (Cz.26#) *I don't know how many people they actually interview so if they can increase that somehow. I imagine that a lot of these companies also outsource these applications to another company... so maybe there is more resource [they] can put in so at least there's more people going to interview so there's less people falling out at an early stage.*
- Pz.03#6 Pz.03# (Cz.26#) *It was one of those ones where you just have to get through as much as possible so they would just keep throwing it at you until the time is up, effectively. So it was an interesting one because they were testing your ability to obviously think on your feet quickly but at the same time it was trying to make sure that you weren't going through too quickly that you were compromising on quality so it's kind of getting that balance between quality and quantity...*

- Pz.03#7 Pz.03# (Cz.26#) You're often forced into one group and, as I say, it may not be conducive to letting you show your ability... it tends to be that you have one or two individuals that just don't let others speak and are constantly talking over people [which] means that you're effectively penalising other people because you just don't see them speak.
- Pz.03#8 Pz.03# (Cz.24#) So I obviously knew [the lecturer] from my time at Pinetree... I knew he'd set up his own business and just approached him about that and...anyway he got back to me a little bit later and said actually there was an opportunity to get involved with his work which he was just getting off the ground so...so this was towards the end of my second year. So I did some work part-time for him then and then I went on to do an internship with him in that summer... throughout my final year I did bits of work wherever I could... he made quite clear to me from my internship... that he was quite keen to offer me a job... it was slightly caveated that presuming he was able to get the company to a stage where it could support me, support its first full-time employee, then he really wanted me to come on board... and that following year when I was starting to look at other things, he did come back to me and basically say, look things are going well ...
- Pz.03#9 Pz.03# (Cz.24#) I must admit I was quite happy that it worked out that way because I was a little bit anxious about... the stress of going to interviews and all the other rounds you have to go through.
- Pz.03#10 Pz.03# (Cz.26#) Thinking about how you think and how you spot patterns and make decisions, what you see in the exercises so particularly that one [shapes] because lots of people see different things and I don't know whether they probably have various different answers which they could be and it helps them to determine how you go through a thought process.
- Pz.03#11 Pz.03# (Cz.26#) (Cz.56#)...and other companies it was word of mouth and talking to friends who were either applying or were currently working there or had worked for those companies. That was not just my peer group but also wider than that so family friends, my parents, some of their friends...I wouldn't say it was off and going out there and I wasn't always going out there and asking these questions but obviously throughout the last two or three years I picked up a quite few things from speaking to people and identified a few companies which I thought, actually that sounds like a company that I could be interested in. I also went to a few graduate fairs... that was very interesting talking to them and hearing their experiences and what they did on a day to day basis. I think the hardest thing I've certainly found, and I know a lot of my friends did, was actually really understanding what the role would really entail on a day to day basis especially when you're applied for quite broad roles or rotational roles and if you weren't a hundred per cent sure as to what you wanted to

do as well it was kind of the unknown because I had...unlike some people I had maybe more internship experience but it was very different to the sort of role I was probably going to be applying for so that was one of the hardest things and that helped quite a lot.

ID Pz.04#

Pz.04#1 Pz.04# (Cz.10#) for start-ups it's usually you go in for a chat and like it's based on gut

Pz.04#2 Pz.04# I think people buy people and like when you actually get in the room it's so much more powerful...

Pz.04#3 Pz.04# (Cz.10#) what I did from the tech point of view is [the employer] had an app and it was a babysitting app so the babysitter and the parent and I went in, logged in as the babysitter on one phone, logged in as the parent and hired myself, I found their bugs and stuff in it ... I actually sent them a really detailed email of feedback...

RTS# So you did this off your own back?

Pz.04# Oh yeah. So...'hope you are well and the rest of your interviews are going well. Here's my feedback'...yeah I think I just said like, 'what did you think?' Because they could see me doing it. Navigation, so adding pictures, credit card payment...it's actually really good feedback [for them]...

RTS# So why did you do this?

Pz.04# ...probably just to show off [laughs] I'm not going to lie!

RTS# [laughs]

Pz.04# 'I'm really good, I'm over here!' But just also to showcase that I had technical skills... Like very much, I'm very much on top of this, I really want this

Pz.04#4 Pz.04# RTS# Okay, so you're thinking maybe [online testing is] not the best way of testing that then, it should be done with a phone call or something?

Pz.04# (Cz.54#) Yeah it probably should be done, but it's a filtering [thing], I think they get so many applications there are filters in place and it's just how you get through those filters and now I hire people I have a very different view of how that works because I feel like when you're there it feels like this massive wall that you're not going to go over, it's like 'got to get through these'...you've kind of got the blinkers on, whereas now I'm hiring I see actually, okay I'm looking for culture fit, I'm looking for this and this and it's just a very different experience, you see that they're not

actually blocks, they're just kind of like...they're not tick box exercises, you're testing for a lot more

- Pz.04#5 Pz.04# (Cz.54#) *About three or four months ago I got an email going, 'we really need a project manager immediately to do an interim role'... so I actually went back and did full circle and became project manager for them at Cz.67#.*
- Pz.04#6 Pz.04# *It's like planting enough seeds and then something will come from it...*
- Pz.04#7 Pz.04# *I walked into the room and I was like, I know I've got this because I've done so much legwork and I know if they need anyone again for conferences and stuff it's done, it's like creating this... personal branding... there's a lot of seeds there that there's a lot of legwork done, so there'd been a lot of energy to put in but it's now starting to build.*
- Pz.04#8 Pz.04# *That's so unfair, there's no-one that my family connections that I would want to...I've never really been introduced to anyone that way, it's all been just getting out there and talking to people*
- Pz.04#9 Pz.04# (Cz.54#) *I applied for a job with them as well, that was very painful when I didn't get that one because I went a little bit too high too quickly... that was quite a horrible application because I got so far really quick...like I knew the right people, I was starting to make friends [and plans]... yeah so it was quite a difficult one that*
- Pz.04#10 Pz.04# [Networking] *actually probably expanded my horizons... so I was doing my dissertation on the internet of things and I kind of [discovered] the London tech scene and there was so much there, it's probably the best in the world in terms of meetups and people and specialisations and just yeah everyone is just so amazing and engaged and so I started going to the conferences...like there's loads and loads of free events... there were so many going on.*
- Pz.04#11 Pz.04# *The thought of a job ad just really turns me off. It's just so beige and it's like it's not a company, a company is people, it's not a document. It's not an A4 piece of paper saying you should have these skills... there is a lot more to it... I didn't want to pigeon hole myself... because there is so much more to play around with and there are different ways. I think it's what I've already learned that there are many different ways of making money.*
- Pz.04#12 Pz.04# (Cz.10#) *It still really hurt because... I'd put a lot in... I think I do go very much full in... that's my approach to things... There was a few of these and they were very much like I'd focus on one at a time, like three or four really good applications where I'd really found great start-ups or small businesses that I wanted to work for, put a lot behind it, got really close*

like this and then it didn't work out and I think that started to go...very emotionally draining

Pz.04#13 Pz.04# *I think people that, like-minded people that go to these events and do extra stuff and I think quite a few with an interest in like diversity inclusion, they were always good ones because... like okay I want to go and learn about this but there'll be interesting people here.*

Pz.04#14 Pz.04# (Cz.10#) *they were really trying to test like your ability to adapt and like take on information which I thought was actually they'd really well thought it out and yeah...now I see the back end of interviewing there is a lot of effort that went into that to get that really sorted and they knew exactly what they wanted*

Pz.04#15 Pz.04# (Cz.10#) *They hired someone with a little bit more customer service understanding or something, they were very clear on what they wanted... with that exercise testing your ability to adapt in a start-up. I think they probably wanted someone a bit more firmer and like confident ... because the person who'd had it had a couple more years' experience in customer service facing roles.*

ID Pz.05#

Pz.05#1 Pz.05# *It seemed to be if it was called a graduate scheme you would have to do those tests.*

Pz.05#2 Pz.05# (Cz.53#) *I actually do think group exercises are a very good way of assessing people... it depends what kind of person you are but I think it can put people at ease, being able to communicate with people that are in the same situation with you, and I do think it is very telling... of what that person is like and what kind of employee they would be as well because you're working in teams... in any situation really in a job, so I think it can show things that people don't necessarily think that they're showing*

Pz.05#3 Pz.05# (Cz.30#)... *they wouldn't tell you what the questions were beforehand, they would just pop up, and then you would have 30 seconds to answer the question and then go onto the next question... there was a countdown, a 30 second countdown and all you can see is your face so it's quite off-putting*

Pz.05#4 Pz.05# (Cz.30#) *it was very difficult, very awkward, I didn't like it at all. Because I think... you do need time to process a question before you answer it so that just gave you no time at all to think about what the*

question was you just have to speak ... so I came away thinking that was awful.

- Pz.05#5 *Pz.05# (Cz.30#) I guess with something like that you have to have a lot of stages... because of the volume of applications you get... you can't meet everyone. But unfortunately that means that people do get quite brutal 'nos' throughout the process.*
- Pz.05#6 *Pz.05# (Pinetree) it worked well in the situation because I obviously knew the company very well, and knew the people that worked in the team quite well so I knew what the culture was like and that kind of thing. So having just one interview did work because it wasn't like I needed to find out a lot more information and I was quite keen to get into that team quite quickly as well so it really worked for me. I do often think if you are going for a job at a new company and you just have one round of interviews...that's not often enough time to get to know what the company is like, what the culture's like, what your manager is going to be like, 'cause often it's half an hour, an hour at most, it's quite hard to get an idea I think in that situation.*
- Pz.05#7 *Pz.05# (Cz.53#) I am always so conscious of what they're thinking, the people that are assessing what they're thinking of each person and what they're looking for. And it's hard to know whether they want someone that's gonna take the lead, someone that's gonna sit and kind of organise everyone...*
- Pz.05#8 *Pz.05# My initial thoughts were trying to get onto a graduate scheme, because that's what everyone was doing, the salaries were also very good with those, and also with great companies, and then I think I quickly realised after that, that that probably wasn't the route for me... Because, I, it didn't make me feel very good applying for those kind of roles because it did feel like I was just a number... and I just thought if that is what the application process is like for these roles in these big companies that's probably how you're gonna feel when you're there as well. I think application processes are quite telling of what the culture is like at the company.*
- Pz.05#9 *Pz.05# (Cz.30#) [the interview] was even worse actually, I didn't enjoy that at all. I was quite nervous for it, and I just remember thinking the person on the end of the phone was doing a lot of interviews that day for a lot of people and they basically had a sheet with questions and they wanted you to just answer the questions and be done with it. And I also got the impression that there were set answers that they were looking for and he was trying to push me in that direction...[] and I could tell that he wasn't very happy with the answers I was giving even though I felt I was just being honest.*

- Pz.05#10 Pz.05# *I think it's asking for skills that aren't really relevant... to the workplace... never have I had to draw on some of those numerical skills that I had in those tests I just don't think it's a representation of that person's ability to do the job...*
- Pz.05#11 Pz.05# (Pinetree) *I think, showing that I had quite a lot of attention to detail, that I'd thought about kind of every angle, and that I really understood the brand as well... Because I think my experience as a student here really helps in the role that I'm in now because I do understand what it's like to be on the other side so I think that probably supported my application.*
- Pz.05#12 Pz.05# *I was never asked things like, what modules did you study and what did you enjoy studying, what did you do your dissertation on, anything like that... [but] things like being part of [social enterprise project], that was really useful in interviews because at that stage you don't have a lot of work experience and a lot of the questions are scenario-based, so I was able to draw on experiences like that, so I felt very grateful that I was given that opportunity.*
 RTS# *So do you think that sort of stuff matters more than the actual degree itself?*
 Pz.05# *Yeah, I think so.*
 RTS# *So long as you've got the degree?*
 Pz.05# *Yeah. Unfortunately, it does, it does seem like having the degree is a tick box and gets you through a door, but your experiences and things that you do around it are the most important in interview for talking points and that kind of thing.*
 RTS# *So nothing on the content at all?*
 Pz.05# *No, nothing.*
 RTS# *So we could have taught interpretive poetry it wouldn't have made any difference?*
 Pz.05# *Yeah... but I found talking about extra things that I did at university really helpful in interviews*
- Pz.05#13 Pz.05# *I think in my mind I always like to be smart, too smart [rather] than too casual so I would always be quite smart for interviews I think... I think it does say a lot about who you are. And it's first impressions as well, it shows that... you've thought about it and you want to come across well and you're taking it seriously.*
- Pz.05#14 Pz.05# (Cz.30# – graduate scheme) *I think through a lot of... the graduate assessment routes it made me feel like I was just a number, and it was a case of them finding your weaknesses rather than finding what you were good at so that they could just give you a no. It did feel like that a lot.*

- Pz.05#15 Pz.05# (Cz.53# – general job) she just made me feel very at ease, she asked me questions about what I was doing that weekend, things like that, and just made it quite a nice experience... She also had such good reactions to everything I was saying as well, so she seemed very interested in everything I was saying and we'd have a conversation about things rather than just her listening to my answer and then carrying onto the next question.
- Pz.05#16 Pz.05# (Pinetree) so I had to write a marketing plan, come up with a bit of a social media plan, um, everything that would be involved in a campaign basically, um and present that to, um, the two interviewers.
- Pz.05#17 Pz.05# (Cz.30#), I think the video interview is quite a quick way of them seeing if you can think on your feet...that you come across well as well and I think a video interview just shows a bit more of your personality as well rather than a phone interview or an application or something.
- Pz.05#18 Pz.05# (Pinetree) I was actually in a role here before that so I was a student support associate, and that was, I think contracted for 12 months and I started working quite closely with the marketing team, organising events and things like that and the role became available so I had conversations with [them] and applied for that role through almost like a recommendation
- Pz.05#19 Pz.05# (Cz.43#) I didn't think it was a very good process at all really. I think, people can practise those tests, they can do a lot of those and get really good at them, just to pass them...

ID Pz.06#

- Pz.06#1 Pz.06# (Cz.45#) It was fantastic... having that amount of experience while I was still at university, that genuine real world practical experience, basically doing the job that I wanted to do whilst I was still at university was very motivating and engaging. It obviously taught me a huge amount that you can't learn on a degree...and yeah I think if I had to then apply for other jobs then it would have made it much, much easier, given that amount of experience. I was getting paid reasonably good money while studying as well which is very nice so yeah it was really good. Hard work....
- Pz.06#2 Pz.06# (Cz.45#) a passion and engagement for what the company is doing, to kind of be excited about it and believe in the values and the mission... and the culture which is very strong in Cz.45#. Cultural fit is probably one of the biggest ones but then for Cz.45# culture is probably one of the

strongest aspects of the company so that would be more important than perhaps other companies.

- Pz.06#3 *Pz.06# Well the obvious part is to give you a foundation understanding of business and all the different levers that exist. I would say much more important than that is the opportunity to do [other things] as well, whether that's engaging with industry, short projects, team work, actually trying to build a business, anything practical, working with people I think is probably much more important, I would say more important yeah.*
RTS# Okay. I'm quite interested, listening to the graduates, on what in my own mind I've started to call the 'second syllabus' ...
Pz.06# Well everyone's got a degree [now] – how do you tell a hundred people apart if they've got a 2:1 or First degree in business? You look at the 'second syllabus' I guess.
- Pz.06#4 *Pz.06# (Cz.45#) I think autonomy is probably one of the biggest ones, so that's his management style if you can call it that, and the company is run with this self-managing structure and decentralised so no-one is really told what to do and people are free to work on what they want so that is probably a must. I mean generally, I don't know if it's fair to say little guidance but there was little oversight in what I was doing... [and I] was left to be very independent right from the beginning really...*
- Pz.06#5 *Pz.06# (Cz.45#) So first year I kind of started working with Sam Appleby on some societies and PCSA and...what was the other one...Selected Perspectives which was the talk series so I kind of got close to Sam and was working with him and Sam was working at Cz.45# so then...and Daniel was obviously my lecturer, he was the CEO of Cz.45#. Got on well with Daniel and found his August lectures very engaging and interesting and then I think I just sent him my CV and said, you know I really like what your company's doing, I find it all very interesting and would love to be able to contribute in some way if possible*
- Pz.06#7 *Pz.06# (Cz.45#) [the lecturer's] recruitment approach to universities... he kind of mentors students, he teaches lots of students, the good ones I think he openly says, you know if people want to come and do projects in my company then please do. Some people come forward, some of them he gives opportunities then do internships which effectively are very very long internships and then some of them after that then get offered a job, which is the best form of interview I think.*
- Pz.06#8 *Pz.06# (Cz.45#) Is it fair?... there's probably a number of different angles you can think about it from. I mean you can say was it fair relative to the cohort that [the lecturer] is kind of choosing people from which is, you know, my peers in the degree... it's those that put themselves forward and showed potential and the right sort of attributes for the company. So I*

think from that perspective it's fair... Is it fair compared to other graduates that didn't have that opportunity? No because they didn't have the opportunity but I guess that's life, isn't it, when opportunities are presented to you makes a huge difference to your trajectory.

ID Pz.07##

- Pz.07#1 *Pz.07## It's also just a way of sifting out the masses and getting it down to a number which is sensible enough to look through.*
- Pz.07#2 *Pz.07## (Cz.43#) I quite liked that [getting the topic in advance] because some graduate schemes make you write the presentation there and then whereas this was actually thought out – they're looking at ideas as well as how you present.*
- Pz.07#3 *Pz.07## (Cz.60#) it was about people being made redundant and one of the stores was going to close and you had to basically build a process to make the people redundant, say what your priorities are and how you are actually going to deliver the message, what would happen if somebody disputed it, deal with that process.*
- Pz.07#4 *Pz.07## (Cz.60#) I remember I got feedback on that and they were like, 'you [were] good and that was fine', and they were actually 'we preferred the position that you played in it, like you didn't take charge of it, which was a good thing' and they were, 'we actually look for people who don't lead the way, we look for people who sit back and give good information and also try and include everyone'*
- Pz.07#5 *Pz.07## I think almost things that went wrong were quite good, so when you're working in a group that you don't like the people in, someone's not pulling their weight, that is a really good life lesson and it's so much better than things going perfectly and you getting an amazing grade because it actually teaches you how to behave.... You can't choose your team when you come to work... I see it as an opportunity to make people get on your side. If someone is very unmotivated, don't see that as a problem, you can change the way they're feeling and that's such an achievement for yourself anyway and if you really need an excuse for why it's going to be beneficial to you, you can then go and use it in your interviews because you've actually turned a situation around. So, yeah, you'll never get a perfect team and it's your responsibility to make every team you work in work for you.*

- Pz.07#6 Pz.07## (Cz.17#) *And then you had to do a video interview.....which was awful. So you get two types of video interviews: you get one where you can prepare for, you know the questions they're going to ask you, and then you get this one which is they can literally ask you anything so it's like a little guy on the screen and he's like 'hello', it's like an actual video of somebody pre-recorded and then you get like ten seconds you have to answer... if you can't think of answer there's no way you're going to have time to think of it again...*
- Pz.07#7 Pz.07## (Cz.43#) *then it had a group assessment which was based around, like, you're lost on a desert island, these are your items, how do you prioritise the items, and then there's a panel who are watching you do it, so it's always a bit nice and awkward.*
- Pz.07#8 Pz.07## (Cz.43#) *My group were really nice, which made a difference because sometimes you go to these things and you've got one very outspoken person and it means that you can't really get on with it whereas this group could work together really easily, so yeah, it was fine, that was the easiest part.*
- Pz.07#9 Pz.07## (Cz.60#) *We did that in a group of people and that was just awful, it just didn't click. We didn't get along and it [was] almost like a bit argumentative.*
- Pz.07#10 Pz.07## (Cz.60#) *So we had to do a role-play, we go into a room and they gave you (no joke) twenty different sheets, different values and then different scenarios about a person but it was so much information to take in and not long enough to take it in. You could write things down but what is like the next stage of it? You don't know what it's for.*
 RTS# *So they sat you down on separate tables, hand you this wad of paper...did they tell you anything about what you had to do? It was just 'read this'?*
 Pz.07## *'Read this'. So you're trying to read it and understand it and try to just make some sense of it and then they take you into the room for the role-play and – it's quite funny – one of their employees just kind of slumps in a chair, like they must be like thirty or forty, but they're acting like a teenager so you walk in and there's this moody teenager and you basically needed to have memorised all their values and understand exactly what they want from their like a disciplinary process, so it's all in this information, disciplinary process, values, case study on this person, you need to take it all in. So you go into this room and they tell you [that] you need to discipline this colleague.*
- Pz.07#11 Pz.07## (Cz.60#) *... so I went in and I was so harsh on them, like 'why are you off?' And then I remember being, 'right well, you know I've warned you before so you're fired!'... I think I said 'one more chance and then*

you're fired' – I think I probably used words definitely you should never say, and you had to find out that his mum was an alcoholic so that's why he was being resistant to going on the training courses because it disrupts things for the family and he had exams and all this stuff and basically you had to work out his emotional problems and why he's behaving the way he is. And then go in line with the disciplinary process for what you do next. So I just messed it up!

Pz.07#12 Pz.07## (Cz.60#) then we had an interview which was really boring and just like a completely bog standard competency interview...

RTS# Okay, so you've had those a lot at different interviews, it sounds like?

Pz.07## Yeah and like a lot of the video interviews and things like start being the same, like the telephone interviews start being the same. It's just bad because you just end up like blah blah blah and you know it off by heart.

Pz.07#13 Pz.07## (Cz.43#) I remember preparing for it and thinking it was going to be another one of those STAR questions but obviously directors don't really care. I remember it just being a chat, literally a chat, it was just me steering it more because I think I was just really interested in it, I was like how do Cz.43# do HR and asking her about her career and a lot of stuff.

Pz.07#14 Pz.07## (Cz.60#) we were just chatting amongst ourselves, chatting to the 'old' graduates... just chatting forever. I was thinking I bet they're going to go back and report what we're saying

Pz.07#15 Pz.07## I never really understood why companies did that. We had a talk here once about it and made me think very differently about them... and they said that it's basically lots of people go to private school and lots of people pay for education and lots of people have very good opportunities given to them, whereas you need to have that natural ability and with the shape tests and things like that... you can't learn that kind of thing, it's about how your brain works, so it's kind of a way of sifting out who's had a good education for the sake of a good education and who actually is genuinely smart and it kind of weans out the people in between. So that's the way I think of it and I think that's quite nice because if you're clever but you haven't had the best education but still you are genuinely smart you can get through those levels.

Pz.07#16 Pz.07## (Cz.17#) I always read their [the company's] annual report because that gives you like a piece of 'gold' that's great ... It tells you everything- you don't need to do anything else. Annual report and the news... Honestly, when you haven't got much time you've got to find quick ways of doing things

- Pz.07#17 Pz.07## (Cz.60#) *I think they're from similar kind of middle class, a bit like how Cz.43# do as well, it's just so standard. If you had any pizzazz about you they'd weed you out in the first stage*
- Pz.07#18 Pz.07## (Cz.43#) *I definitely think ... that they've hired fifteen people who are pretty much carbon copies of each other, we are literally all the same.*
 RTS# *Really? But they said they'd never seen anyone like you?*
 Pz.07## *Yeah, but when you come into work you get people who are polite, who are competent, who have come from quite a similar background and, I don't know, you just don't see anyone with any sort of difference.*
 RTS# *Fascinating. So are you one of the fifteen? Or do you think that you're different?*
 Pz.07## *Of course I'm different! [laughs] I think in some ways I'm similar to them, in other ways I feel like I have more confidence to do things that they won't do, I don't know, like they're a bit cautious... Definitely I'm more like ballsy but in terms of quite well spoken and that kind of thing I think actually we are all quite similar. I do think they maybe haven't given people a chance who are a bit different, like there's nobody with accents, there's nobody who is like from a different ethnicity, nobody with disabilities, that's something that's not very diverse. Everyone's got a degree, obviously as it's a graduate scheme but nobody had done anything other than kind of going to a standard university and doing a course which they thought was useful which then they haven't used. So in that way it's like you're all the same.*
- Pz.07#19 Pz.07## (Cz.17#) *I think [employers] are used to dealing with people who are like just come out of university and so nervous... whereas... I think I was very confident in my answers because they were very real, I wasn't making anything up and everything I did I was very interested in. I'd done like the Pz.65# internship which wasn't so great but you could use it to talk about how you turned around an experience... and then loads of different stuff at the university... that's all they're looking for - a real understanding of current affairs, of what's going on. And I think just because you know all of that you're almost relaxing and want them to ask you stuff because these are fun conversations to have.*
- Pz.07#20 Pz.07## (Cz.17#) *I remember they were like, 'do you want a drink' and everyone's like, 'shall we have a drink?'...and then we went to dinner with all of them and they kind of like split us up and put us on tables with all the employees. That was nice because it settled your nerves and you could talk to them about things before you've even been interviewed at all but I'm thinking, this is probably part of the interview, isn't it, how you actually get on with people.*

- Pz.07#21 Pz.07## (Cz.60#) I didn't feel I did badly until I got the feedback on it and I was like, 'oh, I didn't do that well!' I thought, 'oh actually that's gone quite well, I found out all the stuff about him,' but then in my feedback they were 'you were way too harsh, we would never do that to anyone' and they were 'in Pz.64# we always think about people'. That's kind of what they wanted to see...
- Pz.07#22 Pz.07## (Cz.17#) Then we had an interview and I was so happy because it wasn't a... competency interview, it was kind of like really random questions that didn't really follow any sort of structure... it was much more open discussion and it wasn't me giving my answers, it was me saying a bit and then them questioning on it and then it was just in a way more flowing which was nice. Yes, so that was pretty good and again that was energetic and good.
- Pz.07#23 Pz.07## (Cz.43#) it was like a test to kind of find out your personality type, which I thought was an actual test so I answered all of them [laughs] 'kind of like this, kind of like that...' not honest and then I went into [the interview] and they like presented you with your results - and it costs quite a lot of money for companies to do it, apparently - and they were, like, 'we're giving you the results for free'. And they were like 'we've never seen a test like this... you haven't shown highly on anything or low on anything, everything's in the middle, do you want to talk me through your results and how it relates to you?' So, yes, that wasn't really a test, it was actually a genuine interest that they wanted to know what kind of personality type you are but I definitely read that one wrong
RTS# Was that like Myers Briggs?
Pz.07## Yes, something like that
RTS# So why did you decide to answer in that way?
Pz.07##... I thought it was a bit of a trick and they were looking for your weaknesses, of which I decided not to say any.
- Pz.07#24 Pz.07## Obviously, dress smart, you know, not too showy, just dressing comfortable so you can actually do the task and you're not thinking about how tight the skirt is; you need to be able to relax.
- Pz.07#25 Pz.07## (Cz.43#) I learned this that they all do, base it on their values so it was kind of a question per value... They'd always like swing it towards their values so you kind of knew what was coming and as long as you kind of paid attention to the values then they liked the answer
- Pz.07#26 Pz.07## (Cz.17#) so again just looked over their values, I remember I watched some TED videos – they always inspire me, you can steal different phrases from them and sound clever tomorrow... I think it's helpful if you look at things that are outside of what they're asking to do so loads of TED talks, loads of podcasts, get your brain out of the academic way of

thinking

RTS# And why is that?

Pz.07##... it just helps you to think in a different way and if they're asking you a question you can bring in something random which you've seen here and connect it and... it kind of makes you stand out a little bit more

Pz.07#27 Pz.07## You've got your bog standard [answers] and those are pretty much engrained in your memory from the very start because you've done the applications, you've done the telephone interviews, now you need to look for something different [from other applicants].

Pz.07#28 Pz.07## And then in all your assignments, do primary research, go out and talk to people and find out things. You're in the middle of London... you find someone at LinkedIn ask them, they'll definitely respond to you, that's pretty much what I did my whole way through and you build up this amazing network of people and it's like a good thing to have an excuse to talk to those kind of people and they're so willing to help you and you don't often get that later on in life because they kind of see you as their equal whereas [as a student]...you almost use that 'I don't know anything' to your advantage.

Pz.07#29 Pz.07## [So I've really got used to] getting rejected. And that is a fantastic skill to learn. It's so good because you can go through your whole life being good at everything... but you haven't really seen the world yet, so you can get really good grades but it's not so reflecting of how life is. I think you get very disheartened at the first few rejections whereas I'm actually, 'this is quite good like mental learning for how to deal with rejection'...

Pz.07#30 Pz.07## (Cz.60#) I didn't feel it worked as well for me as it was very rigid and it was very black and white, you could see them grading... I don't like interviews where you can see them ticking different boxes and things, so I think it was just too rigid and it didn't allow for any sort of conversation that was away from their answers, which I think is what made me get through the other ones; I actually had an interest in the work whereas this was tick, tick, tick, mark, mark, mark, done.

Pz.07#31 Pz.07## (Cz.17#) So I thought that was good because it kind of shows they're actually interested in you and it's not so set in stone. I'm really not a fan of interviews which are very black and white and they write down your answers and judge you on that; they should judge you on how you are as a person.

Pz.07#32 Pz.07## (Cz.43#) half of it was, like, how do you improve life for colleagues and the other side how to improve it for customers and you had to come with your ideas of how Cz.43# could change that and then you presented to one person.

- Pz.07#33 Pz.07## (Cz.17#) *Ability to think on your feet. They're also seeing how you come across and whether you're giving answers that are actually relevant to what you're saying, whether you can take in information and give them something useful. I think it's quite easy to fool people in interviews, like they're probably forgotten what question they've asked you by the time you're answered it whereas in that it's very much like, this is the question, what answer have you given. Yeah, just how like personable you are*
- Pz.07#34 Pz.07## (Cz.17#) *it's not about the presentation in the end, it's more about how you actually get to that. I remember thinking, 'oh god, the point is I'll talk as much...I'll really encourage [others] to talk'... and it was in the feedback after, 'you're very inclusive, you're very good', so I was like 'oh okay, that's good'... you don't want to appear very overpowering so you need to include other people's ideas, it isn't just us. So I was, 'maybe you should speak up a bit' and I guess you kind of know there are people who are going to include other people and kind of get the point of this is a group exercise and not just you taking the reins*
- Pz.07#35 Pz.07## (Cz.60#) *I think it's probably as fair as they could make it. I think you had an advantage if you worked at Cz.60# and you definitely did because some of the people who worked at Cz.60# who were 'oh, I'm a manager, got through [to] the graduate scheme, they helped me prepare for this'; and they can name drop quite a bit so, yeah, I think that was the only advantage. (This graduate scheme was open to recent graduates and existing employees. So Pz.07## was competing with existing managers who therefore had a networking advantage under our definition of networking)*
- Pz.07#36 RTS# *So if you were running this what would you want to do differently?*
Pz.07## (Cz.43#) *I think about bit more like life experience, what have you actually done that makes you different rather than how do you sound when you answer interview questions because everyone can prep for that. I think more like the actual doing is important.*

ID Pz.08#

- Pz.08#1 Pz.08# (Pinetree) For me... one of the main things I think that I developed was just in the interviews being less nervous, being able to talk to people... we had to do a lot of exercises like that and doing a lot of presentations and a lot of the elevator pitches I think that helped me tremendously because I used to hate talking in public.
- Pz.08#2 Pz.08# (Cz.04#) once you start obviously it's recording you so if you said something on the previous question it's put you in a fluster [laughs] and when the next question comes in and you see the thirty seconds then it flusters you even more... The whole thing is really off putting...It's freaky! I like to talk to people and sort of gauge how they react to my answers and then I know which way to sort of take action in the interview but with this you have no idea, you just don't know what they want or what they're looking for.
- Pz.08#3 Pz.08# (Cz.38# job) It was another sort of [what I call my] more favourite interviews which was a bit more casual, just sort of talking about previous experience, giving examples of [the] sort of projects [I'd done] and just generally more about talking through my CV, which is the one thing I always do, the only thing I ever take with me is a copy of my CV so I give one to the interviewer and one for me, they always refer to it in the interview, which works [for me] because I prepare that well.
- Pz.08#4 Pz.08# No. Literally...the only thing that they've ever asked me is, it's says here that you did your degree between these years, but you've also had this experience from these years, how is that possible, and I would say well I worked full-time and I did my degree part-time in the evening and they're like, oh okay.
- Pz.08#5 Pz.08# I've always wondered about... how much value they actually place on what kind of degree you have and whether it is just a tick box exercise for them. I think in most cases in my experience it is just a tick box, has he got a degree, yep... they've always asked me about my previous work experience but never about education, never
- Pz.08#6 Pz.08# Always wear a suit [and tie]... It's just first impressions and I feel more confident wearing a suit – I know it sounds ridiculous... I think it commands just a little bit more respect [laughs]
- Pz.08#7 Pz.08# (Cz.39#) for me the competency based questions just put someone into a box and you can't really get their personality, the way they would react to situations, what they've done in the past and just how they conduct themselves whereas if you have a conversation with them and just

sort of dig into what their answers are and just ask [more about] their examples I can gauge [them] much better.

- Pz.08#8 Pz.08# Research, yes. A lot of the time I think it's a little bit of lip service for them because it's kind of...just kind of what they want to hear....*
- Pz.08#9 Pz.08# Well it's just so you know when you walk into the room... who you're walking in with and... you know what to say to them and you might be able to gauge what they would like to hear based on their experience and where they've worked rather than if you go in cold you have no idea what that person's like or what their experience is.*
- Pz.08#10 Pz.08# I suppose graduate schemes they get thousands of applications and I suppose it's the only way they can vet them properly. I think the beginning stage is a bit impersonal so... I think it's just better to... review some CVs, a sample, and just interview those people even if it's just for fifteen minutes rather than have a video recording in their bedroom.*
- Pz.08#11 Pz.08# (Cz.04#) One of them definitely just your ability to analyse data and... when you read the sort of stats just being able to relay them back and then the second one was... how do you react in certain situations*
- Pz.08#12 Pz.08# (Big Pine) In terms of knowing people, at Big Pine that was always [unclear] I had about four or five different jobs there and then every job was always...because I know this person and I've helped them out on some project, they've remembered me and then after about a year they'll call and say, oh we've got a job here and I think you should apply for it and obviously [you get it?] and then at Big Pine every one of my jobs I did that but [unclear]*
- Pz.08#13 Pz.08# And the other thing I would suggest to them is to sort of [unclear] and start making connections on LinkedIn...when they're doing internships...sort of big corporations. I'd always encourage bigger corporations rather than going for smaller businesses for internships...personal preference, you can make a lot more connections, you can meet people, you can talk to them and say, I want to do this when I finish university and it's a...you have a lot more opportunity for people to turn around and say, okay we're going to be looking for a junior in a year's time or in six months' time, just give me a call when [unclear]. I think that happens a lot more with big corporations than smaller businesses*

ID Pz.09#

- Pz.09#1 Pz.09# (Cz.07#) (Cz.15#) *I felt good about it, you know the fact that it was quite tough made me want the job more. If I compare it to the Cz.15# interview process, the fact that I felt that there were skills that were left out, it almost felt too easy... it was almost the thrill of the fight*
- Pz.09#2 Pz.09# *So the first stage of interview is pretty much always the same, it's just an overview of your CV and if you can kind of effectively own that interview my impression is that that generally goes quite well because the interviewers are sometimes a little bit awkward... they want to say can you just walk me through your CV, [but] most of the time they've not read the CV, they just want to know about you and they've got to fill half an hour so you know if you just start talking and then hopefully you go off on a tangent because they say, oh that's interesting, tell me more about that project and so that script of your CV you can probably prepare in advance.*
- Pz.09#3 Pz.09# (Cz.15#) *I think the second phone interview, which got a little bit more technical, gave me the opportunity to talk about the projects that I have been working on in slightly more detail with someone who is interested and can understand that sort of level of detail and level of complexity so again you know that was nice.*
- Pz.09#4 Pz.09# (Cz.15#) *So the thing is it's the way that recruiters search as they say, you know 'I'm looking for someone with a BSc and maybe an MSc' and they, you know they've been given the job description so they're just looking for key words in the job description and they then just plug those key words into LinkedIn and then if you've mentioned it a couple of times in your descriptions and maybe, you know, in the actual skill section then you're probably the first to come up... the way their search algorithm clearly works is by just pulling out key words effectively so if you just say 'key words are here, algorithm' ding ding ding ding ding then it seems to have a quite a big impact.*
- Pz.09#5 Pz.09# *One of the things I did over the past year, which caused a huge spike in the number of people contacting me on LinkedIn was I updated my LinkedIn profile and added just key words to the each of the employment and education sort of sections...buzzwords, if you like. So I basically just said... this is what I did in the roles so... I built CRM systems that did this, this and this and then at the very bottom I would just... [add] key words... literally it would trundle along I think at about twenty five views per week, something like that, and then it shot up to about a hundred and fifty as soon as I did that*

- Pz.09#6 Pz.09# *So yeah recruiters...I had a lot of recruiters get in touch with me probably over the last six months since changing my profile*
 RTS# *So you're not going to them, they're coming to you?*
 Pz.09# *Yeah they message me on LinkedIn, some recruiters are you know trying to promote jobs that are just not appropriate so there's almost a kind of filtering of...*
 RTS# *You've got to sift*
 Pz.09# *Yeah exactly. I always think it's worth maybe a five minute quick phone call with someone if something looks interesting, partly because it's the same conversation every single time so you don't have to do anything new, you're just running them through your CV so that they can then take that CV to another company so that they can have a better understanding of you and what might be appropriate.*
- Pz.09#7 Pz.09# (Cz.07#) *I was given the case study in the interview, that was more of a business style case study, it was a typical management consultancy case study although it was a little bit technical... He again was kind of putting me under pressure but in a perfectly reasonable way and I liked the guy. I think I struggled with that one slightly... because I'd only just been given the material so... it was managing... staffing for a retail shop, how do you manage who's on which till effectively and how do you get the right customers to go to the right tills*
 RTS# *Did he give you any documents?*
 Pz.09# *No he totally just explained the case study*
 RTS# *And then expected you to respond immediately?*
 Pz.09# *Yeah... really challenging, really really challenging. So he sort of gave an overview of the problem and then he said, 'what do you think, how would you go about solving this', and then you basically start talking and at some point he interrupts you and says, 'okay on that why do you think that'... and then he'll give you a little bit more information... 'so we've got you know twenty customers heading to that one store but then actually you've got another store thirty miles down the road, how does that change the situation, is there something you could do?' And you could say, 'okay well have we got vans going between... you know what's the cost per mile'... that sort of stuff, and you start to talk about metrics and he says, 'okay why that metric'... you have to know your stuff on something that you don't know anything about! [laughs] So yeah, really really tough.*
- Pz.09#8 Pz.09# (Cz.15#) *the recruiter actually effectively sent me the questions before the interview... obviously the recruiter talks to the candidate after the interview and says, 'oh by the way what were the questions', the candidate tells the recruiter so the recruiter can tell the next candidate who's about to go in which possibly undermines the...*
 RTS# *It's like being told the questions in the exam to some of the students*

but not all [laughs]

Pz.09# Yeah...so that one was massively easy to prepare for and you know they pretty much stuck to the script.

Pz.09#9 Pz.09# (Cz.07#) My friend told me, he called me on the morning of the Cz.07# interview and obviously of the big four consultancy firms Cz.07# is green...is it green? I don't know, one of them's red, one of them's blue, he said 'what colour's your tie?' and I said 'red I think' and he was like 'no no no you need to get yourself a green tie, go on'.

RTS# [laughs] So did you?

Pz.09# No I didn't... if anyone cares about the colour of tie that I'm wearing I don't want to work there, I think that's just ridiculous

RTS# But you still cared enough to wear a tie?

Pz.09# Yeah

Pz.09#10 Pz.09# (Cz.07# – general job) Some interviews you go to and it's the first time they're looking at your CV, some interviews like this one I went to, you know, he'd clearly studied me and knew exactly what he wanted to ask which was actually to be honest nice because I wasn't repeating the same stuff and it was like talking to someone who was actually interested in me.

Pz.09#11 Pz.09# I like an interview that goes off script, I think it shows that actually there's something interesting to talk about and that for me is like one of the flags that says 'yeah I like these people' and I like, you know, what they do and they seem to be interested in what I'm doing.

Pz.09#12 Pz.09# (Cz.07#) I found this job description for an associate level data scientist at Cz.07# and I thought that would be cool so actually before applying I contacted someone from Cz.07# in this associate data scientist role to just kind of find out a little bit more about the role, whether he was enjoying it, that sort of thing and yeah so he got back to me and I had ... a phone call with him and he was really helpful in terms of giving me tips as well for the application. And then [I] filled out the application... then got through to an HR round interview. Before I did the HR round interview I got back in touch with this guy to get some more tips. So basically at each stage I got back in touch with this guy and got some more tips. So actually that was really nice to almost have an insider...

RTS# Did you just reach out cold on LinkedIn?

Pz.09# Yeah... So I was slightly surprised when he responded but... I'd added those key words to my profile so you know it was a gleaming profile clearly worthy of a response from his perspective!

Pz.09#13 Pz.09# (Cz.15#) [there] was a presentation which I had to prepare on Netflix talking about the datasets that Netflix would have available to them and it was really quite general and the types of problems that you

might be able to solve with these datasets for Netflix as a business and then the methodology that I would use and kind of the approach that I would use. So that was the presentation that I had to deliver

- Pz.09#14 *Pz.09# (other applications) that was slightly different to a lot of the other data science presentations that I've had to deliver in interviews, a lot of the others they give you a dataset and say, we're interested in trying to predict which customers are going to leave us, can you do this and then you come back and deliver, show them your code, show them why you made the decisions you made and then kind of show them the results*
- Pz.09#15 *Pz.09# (Cz.32#) we had to talk about what online retail would look like in 2025, which I believe at the time was in ten years' time, so again quite vague actually, you know a lot of scope to go wherever you want with it*
- Pz.09#16 *Pz.09# (Cz.32#) There was a group exercise in which...I don't know we played with like bean bags and things like that and we had to build a channel to one side of the room to the other and that sort of thing as a team*
- Pz.09#17 *Pz.09# (Cz.07#) so first round interview with someone from HR so typical stuff...[] That was kind of cultural fit type stuff, just sort of very very brief run through of the CV, what I was looking for in the next role*
- Pz.09#18 *Pz.09# (Cz.32#) I think it was cultural fit, that sort of thing. I think it was pretty brief, to be honest, really just sort of testing the basics of can you speak... []are you real basically and is this CV a phoney, sort of thing*
- Pz.09#19 *Pz.09# (Cz.15#) so she set me up with a first stage telephone call with their HR, it was someone from HR, which was more of a cultural fit type interview so it was fairly general in terms of you know what's your background, what have you been doing, what you're kind of hoping to do next, why Cz.15#, that sort of thing.*
- Pz.09#20 *Pz.09# (Cz.15# and others) So I was contacted by a recruiter, actually back in December – I didn't respond until April and that was just about sort of general, are you interested in looking. I didn't respond until April because that was when I started looking slightly more seriously. Anyway I got back in touch with her, she put me...she walked me through a number of different roles she had at the time, of which Cz.15# was one, so she set me up with a first stage telephone call with their HR*
- Pz.09#21 *Pz.09# (Cz.07#) I spoke to the careers consultant at Cz.57# and you know he was like prepare prepare prepare, his entire job was preparing people for the McKinsey, Cz.07#, Bain... you know those interview processes right down to the tie that you wear which for me feels a bit extreme, a bit too much (He was studying for a Masters at Cz.57# at the time)*

ID Pz.10#

- Pz.10#1 Pz.10# (Pinetree) (Cz.13#) I... dressed very smart, spoke politely, didn't raise my voice or anything, didn't get excited over it, didn't pre-empt any situation. I remember sitting upright posture and even though it was informal I treated it as though it was formal.
- Pz.10#2 Pz.10# (Cz.48#) I was upset because I don't mind being rejected, I want to know why I was rejected and I couldn't even get in touch with them to ask why... I had questions, what had I done wrong, what could I have done better, is there anything else I could have applied to... but I think I was naïve as well at the time because it was like why would a company that big reply to me as well... I felt like the application process was also harsh. I felt like you had to be the crème de la crème.
- Pz.10#3 Pz.10# (Cz.20#) I felt very excited at the beginning. I think for me I came out of university not really expecting to get a job straight away. I have a very realistic mindset and I was very interested in [this] job. It sounded interesting, it sounded very creative actually.
- Pz.10#4 RTS# what do you think was key in missing out on this job...?
Pz.10# (Cz.20#) I feel like it was travel and I do feel like it was possibly when I mentioned my disability. I know... we did have the Disability Protection [sic] Act but I found it a lot harder than it should have been. When I explained to them that I wasn't the healthiest and I couldn't do extremely long hours... I think they should have been more understanding, to be honest ...
- Pz.10#5 Pz.10# (Cz.48#- graduate scheme) I'm a perfectionist so I wasn't just going to do it to standard, I wanted it to be great but I don't know if it was great, to be honest, but I just remember being really upset because I didn't even get a reply.
- Pz.10#6 Pz.10# I think my main thing about looking for a job would be I want that connection with someone, that physical connection rather than just over email
RTS# A lot of the time that's all you get for a few rounds
Pz.10# I find that very upsetting because just because a person isn't necessarily good at email or filling out an application doesn't mean they're not suited to the job. I feel that why not give them a chance and then put them on a temporary contract for four weeks and say 'show me what you can do'. If not, maybe that person is suited to a different department and if they're not then they've had that four weeks they've learned.

- Pz.10#7 Pz.10# (Pinetree – general job) I loved the process. I loved the process because it was face-to-face straight away, because I was asked about how I felt about the job because when I said I'm not necessarily able to come in every day they took that into consideration, they didn't say no straight away. It helped that it was a very relaxed kind of informal interview but it was still semi-structured .
- Pz.10#8 Pz.10# (Cz.20#) I feel if I would have progressed to a face-to-face maybe, I don't know, but maybe it would have secured me a place or maybe not of the graduate job but maybe a different job. Just because someone isn't suited to one job doesn't mean they're not suited to another.
- Pz.10#9 Pz.10# (Cz.20#) I always got that feeling that they wanted you to be someone that hasn't got these problems essentially.
- Pz.10#10 Pz.10# (Cz.20#) For me, in my opinion, I like face to face. I find it very hard to type something...not very hard but I prefer speaking to someone because you can see their emotions, you can see their facial actions and I wish that was more involved in the stage...
- Pz.10#11 Pz.10# I've always been taught that you should be the best dressed in the room, kind of thing, if you're going to do something do it properly or not at all and I knew I wanted this role, I knew I wanted to be here so impressions, first impressions count, five seconds and you know what a person is like.
- Pz.10#12 Pz.10# (Cz.20#) I was upset: it's not the greatest feeling being knocked back or not being able to take a job because of a particular requirement [travel] but it didn't stop me. I was still as determined, if not more determined to gain a job.

ID Pz.11#

- Pz.11#1 Pz.11# (Cz.58#) and they took me to the kind of showroom where all the shoes are and kind of talked me through the different types of shoes and I remember just thinking, oh my gosh I stick out like a sore thumb... with my pretty floral top on.
- Pz.11#2 Pz.11# It does make you think like, it is a big part of my CV, you know the uni I went to and the kind of stuff I did and I'm surprised that more of them didn't ask about it actually.
- Pz.11#3 Pz.11# (Cz.16#) So I...researched about the product, kind of the language that Cz.16# spoke... like on the website... I knew that I had to prove that I knew Cz.16# or had put efforts into understanding the company... I definitely think it helped that I said that I loved Cz.16# and... showed them I'd researched the brand et cetera.
- Pz.11#4 Pz.11# (Cz.40#) that's probably helped me maybe get my first interview because reading the way they write about the tea and reading the way they write about their journey, I was trying to kind of replicate that RTS# Oh okay so you were trying to resonate with them, look like you were already working there
Pz.11# Yeah already talking like Cz.40# but yeah I think that helped and same with Cz.16#
- Pz.11#5 Pz.11# (Cz.40#) they probably get millions, not millions but loads and loads of applications and they want to probably pick people that actually have taken their time to seriously consider the role and them as a company
- Pz.11#6 Pz.11# (Cz.16# 2) So unfortunately I didn't get it but this is why it makes such a good story – well, in my opinion! – so they went for the external [candidate] and I was convinced they'd go with me, I know Cz.16# so well et cetera but actually they had a [manager] who sat down with me afterwards and gave me some feedback which actually... I'm going to carry with me I think. One of the first things he said was, because I knew them, I didn't sell myself as much. Because I knew who they were I didn't really tell them stories, so he said when he first met me and I told him about my experiences I told a story, I kind of made it come to life.
- Pz.11#7 Pz.11# (Cz.09#) I was so upset about it because it was such a cool agency and it was working with different brands and I remember... messaging [a colleague] saying, 'oh my god, I don't know what to do, I haven't got it!'... I think at that point I just kind of thought this is all I've got [laughs] the only opportunity I've got.

- Pz.11#8 Pz.11# (Cz.16#) they asked me to come back and do a presentation on like I think they gave me like a toaster and I had to launch it in the UK and how I would do that, so from...if I would go to retail, if I would go through social media, what was my whole kind of launch campaign, so I had to do a presentation on that
- Pz.11#9 Pz.11# (Cz.09#) For that they wanted me to do a presentation and this was going to be on a social media campaign that really caught my eye and why and kind of present that back to them
- Pz.11#10 Pz.11# (Cz.16# 1) oh yeah they said, they would like you to go to the next round so...which was to put together a one page Word document or one slide PowerPoint presentation on a content strategy for one of our products so it was for their cord-free, I think their new cord-free at the time. So that was interesting because a content strategy to me is a detailed document about how we're going to launch a product but they wanted a very concise, one page, one slide... so really concise which I was umming and ahing about but I think stats are quite important for strategy so I think they wanted to see like selling X amount by X date and things like that so I put that together and they sent it through
- Pz.11#11 Pz.11# (Cz.09#) I think they also want to see the kind of things that appealed to me like I think looking at their website they want to see character as well... why we like what we like and why it resonates to us as well.
- Pz.11#12 Pz.11# (Cz.16# and others) So I signed up to a recruitment agency who specialise in marketing and digital jobs in the south-west, they were called Cz.02# and when they tell you about jobs they don't tell you the company until you kind of go into more deeper conversations so I didn't even know Cz.16# existed so they kind of rang me up and said, you're going to be near Bristol aren't you so here's the role. It was a content exec role so they sent me over the job description and it just had roles and responsibilities, accountabilities...it definitely seemed like a step up from my role at Pinetree so I think from there they put my name forward and put my CV forward - so they had that all on record - to Cz.16#
- Pz.11#13 Pz.11# (Cz.16# 1) So I went for my first interview but before that Cz.02# were quite good in that they kind of told me who the company were, what...things from dress code to interview tips – yeah 'cause Cz.16#'s not very suited and booted, quite chilled and relaxed attire – so things that would kind of help me get through the door and guided me about...kind of went through the job description and maybe highlighted things that I could talk about with my CV, which was really helpful.

ID Pz.12#

- Pz.12#1 *Pz.12# I would definitely arrange meetings with them where I sit with them on a regular basis maybe, every few weeks and discuss what they enjoy, where they see themselves, [the] kind of experiences they've [had] that have been positive, those that have been negative and see everything as a learning experience. I would then say, take some time to think about their purpose, because I think having a purpose is really important.*
- Pz.12#2 *Pz.12# (Pinetree) then after that was the scenario kind of role play questions whereby because of part of my role I do have to do presentations and workshops to students and also very much manage the working relationship with teachers and our institution as well, as well as of course going to big Fairs and events and things like that so they wanted to give me some example questions of the sorts of things a teacher would ask or a student would ask and see how I would respond to that... so, very much replicating what I do now.*
- Pz.12#3 *Pz.12# (Pinetree) I'd been a student ambassador which is kind of quite a natural progression into the recruitment industry but then also, I had expressed an interest in coming to work at Pinetree as well already.*
- Pz.12#4 *Pz.12# (Pinetree) I quite enjoyed it to be quite honest, I think, through studying with Pinetree we did do a lot of presentations, we did do a lot of activities that did prepare us for that so we did get to go to a lot of companies, do presentations and pitches to various prospective maybe even employers in the future so it became more second nature so it wasn't daunting or scary.*
- Pz.12#5 *Pz.12# (Pinetree) I think, perhaps a few different kind of maybe qualities, like kind of proactivity and dedication and showing a real strong interest but then I think ... my whole previous experience at Pinetree then wanting to work for the other side of it I think really did help because ... I do have to draw on my own experiences or talk about kind of the student experience [in my role]... so having that direct experience and obviously therefore complete knowledge of the... course set I think really, really helped me because I could understand from multiple perspectives what would then appeal to the student later on. So I think that certainly helped, but I think it was a combination of things really.*
- Pz.12#6 *Pz.12# (Pinetree) So the process I went for that, so that was a recommended role, um, by James Thomas. So, he, we had regular meetings before that talking about, as he does with all the students, speak to them, talk about kind of their career ambitions, what it is that they want to get into, um, where do you see yourself kind of in your first role*

type thing, and I did say that I that kind of option A would really be Pinetree, 'cause through all my research, all the companies that I'd been to on industry days, it was Pinetree and of course wider Pinetree that, the culture, the values, all of that sort of thing, really appealed to me. And I didn't see another institution that I preferred I really wanted to continue that whole university journey

- Pz.12#7 Pz.12# At the time when people were applying for graduate roles... I remember not kind of feeling like I was in full agreement of them... it felt like going to a company being amongst in some instances hundreds maybe thousands... I think the pressure of kind of almost competing for positions, I thought was not necessarily the most productive way of figuring out whether you like a company*
- Pz.12#8 Pz.12# I think networking is really important, making sure that there's people out there who are looking out for you and you can maybe turn on them later on and find a job with them so I think, yeah*
- Pz.12#9 Pz.12# Almost became more like a bit of a almost not a box ticking exercise but almost that kind of determination and getting to that next step but then, if you don't get it, it's that, again, the rejection but then also it might not have been the right pathway and I think, it's also, it seemed like a lot to have a decision made when you're still very much in the midst of kind of the peak exam period or the peak assessment period to kind of be like, ok, I'm ready to now apply for a job that could then shape the rest of my life, even though you know not necessarily jobs for life, but, it seemed, yeah it just didn't seem like the right step for me. I wanted something that was more of um, kind of, well not necessarily a permanent role, but then something where I felt like I could make a genuine contribution to that company. I wasn't there and seen as someone that would be here and disappear in a few months. I think that's what it was it was more, I wanted to feel valued wherever I went, and that I genuinely could make an impact, so I'm not saying that graduate schemes aren't good I'm sure they're incredible*
- Pz.12#10 Pz.12# No matter whether it's related to employment whether it's related to volunteering, whether it's related to something kind of, something else. And I think I would help them link a job role to that purpose. Advise that there are lots of options out there and whether it be a big company, small company, think about corporate culture, think about the pay, the the responsibility level, the industry. I don't think it's quite as simple as find a job and apply, it's figuring out in themselves what's best for them.*

ID Pz.13#

- Pz.13#1 Pz.13# (Cz.31#) *I actually think that my presentation was – without sounding boastful – but I think it was the best, because I did work a lot on in with Frances and Will and came into Pinetree and practised it, so I mean they were giving me tips. I mean each time I did it, it was a different presentation. So it was basically like I was acting to a script, so that's why I thought the presentation was actually pretty good compared to everyone else's.*
- Pz.13#2 Pz.13# (Cz.31#) *the first exercise was we had to draw three different things so it was like Pictionary and the other group had to guess what it was. I guess it was just a way to see our character as we were joking about it and stuff, it was very casual.*
- Pz.13#3 Pz.13# (Cz.50#) *as someone that's a bit introverted it does take a few moments to feel comfortable... but I do feel that working in groups is a great way in actually bringing about their confidence, seeing how they interact with everyone. I did enjoy that, I enjoyed speaking with everyone.*
- Pz.13#4 Pz.13# (Cz.31#) *what I do think caught me off guard was the one-to-one interview because I did go in there with the mindset of professional, so how I would react to 'what's your weakness, what are your strengths'... and then when they did ask me [what items would you take on a desert island]...I just, it was very basic and I did notice that compared to the other candidates when they were getting interviewed I came out pretty quickly so I guess there wasn't much of a conversation flowing in terms of what I was saying. So I think that created kind of a dead end with what I said.*
- Pz.13#5 Pz.13# (Cz.31#) *I think they were looking for a bunch of things. I mean, I had to lie on a few bits, well one of the questions was 'what was the best piece of marketing you have seen in a shop'. I was stuck trying to remember, I mean I've been to Cz.43# and stuff and you're not really concentrating on stuff like that so I just made a story about how at a game shop they were hosting an event and had people come in and do stuff.*
- Pz.13#6 Pz.13# *When I do prepare I usually just read up on the company. What I do look at a lot is their values, their mission, because what they say there you can fit into your own ideology when you're speaking about them so I could say something that relates to them. I might not think [that] about myself but if it fits in with my character then I can actually spin it to apply to myself.*
- Pz.13#7 Pz.13# *I have adapted my CV to be more flexible so I've just changed a few key words to fit that role... So on my CV I've got this one line about 'I'd very*

much like to work with x-company, x has always been a passion of mine' so, yeah, I just keep it basic like that and then even in my cover letter I've got a little bit where I talk about the employer, so 'I would very much like to work with x-company as its values stand for x x x' so with one company I'd write diversity and innovation and for another I'd write inspiration, so just bits like that to fit with their values.

Pz.13#8 RTS# So what did you think was the key reason why you didn't get through to that next round?

Pz.13# (Cz.50#) I feel it may be my communication. I've been rusty with it for a lot of years. That's what I feel was probably the main cause.

RTS# What do you mean by that, you being rusty with it?

Pz.13# So I never really speak much so when it does come to speaking, like now, it's a bit difficult to form a sentence. I know what I want to say but gaps appeared so I think that might have been a bit of an issue

RTS# That's very interesting, thank you for sharing that.

Pz.13#9 Pz.13# (Cz.50#) I feel if it was a one-one-one, face-to-face I could have explained myself better and actually brought my character across. So I do wish they had done one-to-one interviews as well

Pz.13#10 Pz.13# (Cz.50#) I mean [in] different situations people [behave] very differently I think and... you've got to weight[sic] it all a bit together. Someone could be very cocky and loud-mouthed and you think this guy's very...when they're in an office environment they might become a problem, so I think it's looking deeper into everything.

Pz.13#11 Pz.13# (Cz.31#) there are so many people that have talents that would fit into any role but they just haven't had the opportunity... just basically opening the door to everyone to actually show you know what you're doing is actually a great way to do things. It opens the door for a lot of people. I mean, there's more competition for me but it's more fair I think.

Pz.13#12 Pz.13# (Cz.31#) So I basically did a competitor analysis, I just did a slide show with pictures, I tried to make it very child-like so that it would fit the Cz.31# theme and I actually enjoyed that ... So I just did a competitor analysis, I picked Disney and Cz.31# and then I did a few extra bits at the end, oh and at the end I did come up with a product service idea that they could implement if they wanted to.

Pz.13#13 Pz.13# (Cz.31#) they wanted all the candidates to prepare a presentation so it was on one of their shows called Blaze and the Monster Machines and they basically wanted us to find a new way to break the show into the market to reach new children and how they could evolve it. So I spent a month working on that for the day. I added a PowerPoint.

Pz.13#14 Pz.13# (Cz.50#) so one of the tasks was you were stranded on an island and there's a list of ten items you have to decide which five you're going to keep and they were just looking at how we're discussing, who's taking the lead and all those little bits ... And then throughout the evening there were other different ones where five people that you would have to save in the world, having to justify your decision and then...so those were the first two tasks and at the end of it was more of a task where it was built about a role. So the role was in marketing and in groups, in different several groups, we had to justify...we had to come up with an idea of how we'd sell [a service] to others

ID Pz.14#

Pz.14#1 Pz.14# (Cz.11#) it was mostly competency questions, talk me through your experience, that kind of thing, sort of a screener I think just from their perspective just to get to know the person behind the CV, see if they were competent in interview situations... [eg] Give me a situation where you took the lead on solving a problem, give me an example of a time you worked in a team, so just proving that, you know, the stuff you'd written on your CV was true and just examples of when you'd done that

Pz.14#2 Pz.14# [it] is a shame because actually I think having a business degree does allow you to hit the ground running better than any other degree could do because you have the context... I see all the graduates come in and it takes them six months to pick up that side of working life and it's you know kind of instant to pretty much anyone who went here, all my peers in my year.

Pz.14#3 Pz.14# I would have talked about... the different stuff we did outside so mostly like the workshops that we do I definitely would have talked about so going like on industry days or having companies come in and talk or doing like miniature projects like we did in the first year with Pz.65#, stuff like that, like the extra-curricular stuff that we do. I wouldn't necessarily talk about the actual content of the course that I studied, no. I never would discuss that really...

Pz.14#4 Pz.14# Something like business strategy that's on the module is like it's so useful to have all of that knowledge and it never came up and it's on my CV, it says I studied business strategy and no-one ever asks, 'oh what does that mean', and I think about some of the frameworks really quite often at work and it seems like non-one else does... it seems like not one person other than me has read a business book [laughs] which is... strange...

- Pz.14#5 Pz.14# (Cz.11#) *It's like a tick box...I don't think they necessarily care much about that now, graduates are cheaper partly but also if you've done a degree... it's like an insurance point... just check it off. But it doesn't matter what they've done, in my company people have done [degrees] in history and English and all sorts of degrees. It's just kind of like you've got a degree, okay that's cool*
- Pz.14#6 Pz.14# *I think it's partly because everyone just takes a degree for granted, 'everyone has a degree' kind of attitude to looking for graduates and it's kind of then like well we know you've got a degree, everyone has a degree, what else did you do, so the focus of what is talked about in interviews and what is populating your CV is, okay the degree's there but tell me a bit more about everything else because that's what stands you out from everyone else who has a degree.*
- Pz.14#7 RTS# *Do you think there's a difference between like using your family network versus your commercial network?*
Pz.14# (Cz.11#) *Not really, no. It depends on the level maybe, I don't know, depends on like the seniority of the role, like if it's – only because I have it like in my head – I'm thinking the CEO, his niece was looking for a job and he gave her a graduate position, that's a bit different than you being hired as CEO of Cz.56# and being like, okay, I'll make my brother CMO, it's not quite the same but yeah I mean I think there's a difference, no, between commercial and family*
RTS# *Okay, you don't think there's a difference?*
Pz.14# *No*
RTS# *So you think the CEO who appoints his niece in a graduate job is perfectly fine?*
Pz.14# *I wouldn't say it's perfectly fine but I would say it's...only because she's very capable of the job...ah it's tough, isn't it..?*
RTS# *I mean I have no view, I'm just genuinely interested in what you think?*
Pz.14# *I've never really thought about it actually...I think it's okay, I mean it's fine...because if she wasn't doing the job well then something would be done about it, you know...hopefully [laughs]*
- Pz.14#8 Pz.14# *You want to look like you've prepared, it comes back to that same old thing, you want to have questions because you just want to show that you have thought about it and you are genuinely interested ...*
- Pz.14#9 Pz.14# (Cz.46#) *You understand why they do it because you know they get so many more applications and they have so many less places but yeah it's just a lot longer and it almost turns you off straight away because you know it's a barrier straight away to have to fill in all the information a second time round and if you do a few grad schemes it's the same and you can use the same information across all of them but you kind of want to*

tailor each application and there's just not enough time to do that for all of them

- Pz.14#10 Pz.14# Just to get a sense of them and also... I always look at how long people have been at the company, you just want to know that, you want to get a feel for... are people staying there long, do they leave quickly, what's the kind of turnover like*
- Pz.14#11 Pz.14# [I do] a lot of research on what the company does... a little bit about the competitors... what the industry they're in is like, where they stand... as much as possible... even to the extent... if the person who emails you, you look them up to see what their background is*
RTS# So why do you do that?
Pz.14#... I don't know, you just want to look like you've done your homework a little bit, you don't want to be caught out, just to look like you care even
- Pz.14#12 Pz.14# (Cz.11#) You can do as much research as you like but I know my company is purposely vague on their website because they want you to like really do your research before you come*
- Pz.14#13 Pz.14# (Cz.46#) they don't feel very human, you know. You apply to other jobs and it feels more like, okay someone's actually going to read this, like especially on LinkedIn, sometimes the job posting will have the actual person who is looking after it and they've got like a name and a photo and a job title and you're like okay, you can see exactly who this is going to, whereas a grad scheme kind of seems like you're applying to a robot who is then going to like just automatically discard you or accept you based on what you've put in...*
- Pz.14#14 Pz.14# (Cz.11#) Competency, the ability to present and not be overwhelmed by that challenge, the fact that you were good at it because... you have to be able to present and I think they wanted to see that you could do that and... depending on what you've chosen to present about, they can tell quite a lot about you I think... it tells you a lot about the person just in terms of what they've picked and how they've also perceived that challenge so yeah I think it's kind of a mix of those things really.*
- Pz.14#15 Pz.14# I always wear a suit and a tie because it's easier and it's more comfortable. I feel more comfortable... I'd rather be overdressed than underdressed... again I think it's down to preparation, you just don't want to look underprepared, you want to look like you've made an effort and spent time thinking about it and how you're going to come across and... I feel like I'll perform better if I'm not worried about how they think I'm going to be perceived based on what I'm dressed in, so if I'm in a suit and tie they [will] perceive me one way and that makes me more relaxed,*

yeah...even if, I mean it literally happened in my first interview, at the end he said, oh I've never worn a tie in one day in my working life, and I was like okay, I won't wear a tie in my next interview... but I still for a first interview would just go in a suit and tie

Pz.14#16 Pz.14# (Cz.46#) [They are looking for] someone who has really seriously thought about each step of the application form. If you've actually spent a significant chunk of your time focusing on it and dedicating time to it I think that shows that you really want it at that stage, whereas I think a lot of people just kind of do a load of grad scheme applications and kind of just splurge answers into each field and I feel like they would be able to tell the difference between someone who really wanted to apply for that grad scheme and someone who was really just doing the rounds and applying to lots because that shows that you really want to work at that company or in that role.

Pz.14#17 Pz.14# Work experience is definitely key, I would say, that was kind of the one thing...that was like how did I stand out [from] the other candidates and that was kind of what they said it was, you know you had really good work experience... I had a part-time job throughout uni so I think that shows a bit of graft or potentially you could interpret it that way, and I was there for like five years so it kind of instils a bit of loyalty

*Pz.14#18 RTS# What made you decide to do a presentation on role models?
Pz.14# (Cz.11#) I don't know...looking back now, I just wanted to do something a bit different, I didn't really want to do it on like my dissertation... I just wanted to show my style in a subject I kind of had a lot of interest in... I basically tied the role models to criteria that I deem really important in success, I think that was curiosity and integrity and so I made like a theme around that and I just thought it was a nice way of sort of conveying that message and that idea...*

RTS# So you said you deliberately didn't want to talk about your dissertation

Pz.14# Yeah... I thought they wouldn't remember, I thought I wouldn't stand out... because I feel like I thought that a few people would have done that and having talked to people afterwards quite a few people do do that as their presentation and I just wanted to do something different and kind of catch their eye a little bit more by doing something kind of a bit out there, not really that out there, but a bit different to usual

Pz.14#19 Pz.14# (Marketing co) I mean I liked especially having a recruiter like really not hold your hand but give you support and feedback and just kind of a bit more human interaction before you actually go in was really useful for me. Instead of kind of...otherwise you kind of feel you're going in blind a little bit.

Pz.14#20 Pz.14# It's quite embarrassing but I feel like I have a sense of pride in that I just applied for a job on Guardian jobs and like I didn't go through my network which is silly but like I just kind of...I don't know, I wanted to just do it myself the first time just to kind of prove to myself that I could which is, I don't know, weird but...

RTS# No it's interesting. Explain that a bit more.

Pz.14# I don't know, I just didn't want to like have a family friend say, well I have this opening if you want it and just...basically I think I just wanted to wait for the right job, not that I was picky but I didn't want to just start work just for the sake of it because I could get a job here because someone I knew could get me [one]... I wouldn't do that now, now I would definitely be like, does anyone know of anything, like you give me some pointers?

Pz.14#21 Pz.14# (Cz.11#) It has happened in my company, someone senior comes over and says, oh we need to fill this role I know someone perfect for it, there's nothing wrong with that in my eyes, it's kind of part of it, it just...it works, but that isn't to say you might find a better candidate out there, it's easier in a way

RTS# Do you think it's easier to go with someone that you know?

Pz.14# It's easier for the company to do that than say you know have to interview loads of people and if they know that there's someone here that will do the job well and they can work with then why wouldn't you go that route, I mean it's how people set up businesses together

ID Pz.15#

Pz.15#1 Pz.15# (Cz.55#) I think it was for their benefit rather than the graduate just to keep that interview period short and concise so that they had time to sift through them all... I think that they probably had so many applications they couldn't physically see everyone.

Pz.15#2 Pz.15# (Pinetree) I approached [them] to ask if there were sort of any positions I was interested- I knew they were currently recruiting for a Marketing Executive. And so [they] met with me and said they've just filled that but we do have the Alumni role that I do think you would be well suited, send me your details, so I did that. And then [they] got in touch and I came in and I met with [them] and that was- that was it really... I [had already] spent four months with them in the beginning... after my first year before my second, that summer.

Pz.15#3 Pz.15# (Pinetree) I know I keep talking about relationships but essentially that is a lot of what it boils down to. And I think being personable and

being able to maintain those relationships and build them with people that you don't know as well, and to do it quickly and to have that longevity to it, so, that they, you know they do stay in touch...

- Pz.15#4 Pz.15# *I don't think [a degree has] got the same, what's the word, it's not held as a- a small group of prestigious people that have gone to university, it's very open and inclusive now, which is great, but obviously then naturally that level then becomes a standard. Then you need to have something else then on top. So, for some jobs I think that a degree is not enough.*
- Pz.15#5 RTS# *On what basis do you think that they were sifting? What were they looking for?*
Pz.15# (Cz.55#) *well they asked a lot specifically about their supply chain and about the specific role that you are applying for to make sure that you actually understood the terminology and their way of working and why it was different to other retailers. So they were making sure that you had those key words and all this information is on the... website you can read about it*
- Pz.15#6 Pz.15# *Train them on Linkedin. Everyone needs a Linkedin profile. Everyone needs to understand how Linkedin works with those key words. And some of our graduates have got jobs from that.*
- Pz.15#7 Pz.15# (Cz.55#) *[on the shape and logic tests] Unless you learn those, you know, you can put what you think the answer is but you don't know for definite. When you do Maths, you- you know if that's the answer or- or not. And English, again, you can, if you're literate enough you know that that's the right answer. For the Logic one you couldn't be sure.*
- Pz.15#8 Pz.15# (Pinetree) *I think that my work ethic paid off. [They] knew me from the four months that I had worked with [the] team, [the manager] knew me as a student and academically... I performed well so they knew my ability in that sense. So I just think again relationships and people... That old saying does, you know, sometimes actually work.*
- Pz.15#9 Pz.15# (Cz.55#) *And then it went to the third round, which was the video interview...which was the most horrific experience of my entire life... I just found it difficult not talking to a person. I found it pressurising with the time. If you're in a normal interview you can take a moment, compose yourself, think about what you want to say, you can stop half way through, you can take a sip of water, you know.*
- Pz.15#10 Pz.15# *He showed us 5 CVS and all of them from different people and they're pretty much absolutely identical. And they use the same key words and the same kind of approach and layout... and he said, 'what if your covering letter is just a... haiku poem or something... someone's gonna*

either go yes or no to it instantly, but just that different approach. They see so many CVs just try and do something different.

RTS# So you would try and...

Pz.15# Match what they're looking for.

RTS# But also try and have something expressed a little bit differently to what you think others might be expressing?

Pz.15# Yeah. I'd probably try to do that and in reality it probably doesn't work.

RTS# Well, you've ended up with two job offers...

Pz.15# That's what I'd would love to- I'd love to be brave to do what he said and just do that poem. And I try and you know, have that mindset but it probably just ends up very standard just like everyone else's (laughs).

RTS# Because matching the key words to what they have in their website is the opposite of the haiku poem, isn't it?

Pz.15# Yeah, really, yeah.

RTS# Yeah (laughs) unless you use their keywords to make a haiku poem.

Pz.15# Yes, that would be a better idea. Yeah, see, so it doesn't, that mindset isn't, it doesn't [come easily]...

RTS# Well I don't know from what you've said you're very aware of like the way that they would search. Like if they search for key words, and you've got a haiku poem without any key words in it then it's...

Pz.15# It's not going to come up.

RTS# So you might be very sensible what you're doing.

Pz.15# Yeah.

Pz.15#11 Pz.15# (Cz.43#) they did [a] really random one, "How would your friends describe you in three words?"... (laughs) You don't want to say how your friends really would describe you... But you try and think... what an employer, the skills an employer wants in a person and then... try and match those two things... I struggled with that question. (Laughs)

Pz.15#12 Pz.15# The key thing in LinkedIn it does searches by key word for recruiters and things like that so I'm trying to make sure that those are in there. [for example] campaigns, content creation, things like that.

RTS# So to some extent the purpose of this is to come up on recruitment searches?

Pz.15# Yeah because otherwise they won't [find you]- you know, that's what they're looking for those key words again that's how they're gonna filter.

Pz.15#13 Pz.15# Yeah a million per cent like you need to— you need to like talk to people and you need to find out what the different roles are and you need to make relationships with people so that you can pull on those relation-like, for me to get that uh, week's work experience, essentially I had to have two of those relationships in line before it even got to someone who

could offer me a week, so I suppose, yeah definitely having those, it does make a big difference. Very important. And even just knowing how to-learning how to talk to people, you know and summing yourself up in a little sentence, and being able to have those first introductions...

*Pz.15#14 Pz.15# (Cz.55#) if you look at that I'd done a week's work experience with Cz.43# and then off the back of that, you know, been offered a job. And a lot of my working life it's kind of gone that way, through merit, through actually working and making those relationships. And I don't think perhaps the interview process [and tests] suits me because I can't – I can't come across in that way. They don't know that about me.
In her view, the method she used to gain a week's work experience through her work network was more meritocratic than semi-automated methods.*

Pz.15#15 Pz.15# (Cz.43#) I suppose the relationships that I built just within that week with the- the Head of the division and just... proving myself, getting involved and learning about everything that they did just my whole attitude and approach to everything.

ID Pz.16#

Pz.16#1 RTS# Did they ask you anything about your subjects or your grades or anything about your actual degree?

Pz.16# (Cz.61#) No, less, much less than you would have thought or you would have expected

Pz.16#2 Pz.16# It's about the impression you want to give and if you're wearing a suit with a nice tie and shirt and you've cared about it, plus one thing I've noticed from being the other side is it sometimes adds distractions. If you've buttoned your shirt wrong you're always going to have the impression that person's buttoned their shirt wrong so you almost want to make yourself smart but a blank canvas almost... neutral so not distract from what you're saying

Pz.16#3 Pz.16# (Cz.61#) ...so shy...one was I guess...so I have perceptions of them, I think one was quite...trying to put it in a business term but quite needy, wouldn't really be a self-starter but needed lots of kind of encouragement and kind of show them exactly what they needed to do throughout and yeah one was a car salesman type of person was the impression, almost a bit of a geezer...so yeah that's quite subjective and you can't really train that out of somebody I guess

- Pz.16#4 Pz.16# (Cz.61#) *Yeah, the three of us that were hired were quite similar, similar age, similar kind of interests and yeah*
- Pz.16#5 Pz.16# (Cz.61#) *I liked the process... All my emails went through a lady called [colleague] and [she] was always available for me to email and ask questions to so I got quite a personal feel from it and felt that the company came across quite well... and it was nice that everybody kind of showed an interest and wanted to get to know you... so very positive from that process*
- Pz.16#6 Pz.16# *So I would certainly look at core values, that's something that kind of has often come up doing interviews, how you fit into a company's core values, I think it's just something recruitment managers [like].*
- Pz.16#7 Pz.16# *One thing we didn't cover ...[is] when you're doing an internet kind of application so more support on those, some example ones and working through it, picking out best answer and stuff like that... putting it actually down into words is something that I certainly never did at uni but I think more people should. I just think it's the nature of the beast and more people are applying for jobs, certainly through online software tools, that's what people are using now.*

ID Pz.17#

- Pz.17#1 Pz.17# (Cz.42#) *I was in my room on my iPhone playing this game! ... you played as a little Martian character thing and you had to go through these I think was about ten levels... I never [understood] what they were measuring or if it was useful by any means but it certainly made me talk about it and told my friends...*
- Pz.17#2 Pz.17# (Cz.42#) *It was like a problem solving game with this Martian so maybe it's the sort of ways to approach certain issues and problems... So it would be...for instance it would be you pull up in this maze... and it would just be sort of... loads of different routes, like any other maze, and it just shows a way that we're thinking of going round or on the flipside there was another one...you have X amount of rockets or whatever and you have to choose what to fire them at and there'd be a points based system...so it was bizarre, I really didn't know what it did*
- Pz.17#3 Pz.17# (Cz.12#) *the managing director one was...I didn't know, I was on edge, he was talking to me about football and I thought...*
 RTS# *That's the one that sounds the most relaxed but you felt the most on edge?*

*Pz.17# Yes, exactly actually because I anticipated thinking this is the last hurdle, you know, if he doesn't like me then it's not good and if he does then I get the job and there was no instruction prior to say that this is what the interviews are going to consist of and yeah I was really on edge. It was the most nervous I've been and I would say I'm quite typically direct in conversation myself anyway so I went in there, he started talking about football and he's from Glasgow... and talking about my background and family and everything and yeah I was waiting for the questions on my degree and the questions on experience and then just... he made a joke at the end that I would be a great addition to the five-a-side team then and I thought [laughs] I didn't know how to react to that so yeah...
RTS# But luckily you knew what he meant [laughs].*

Pz.17#4 Pz.17# (Cz.12#) That's what I was shocked about the most because, you know, you go through a degree to kind of...well when I look back on it now it seems like a sort of passport for these jobs... and you know you need to have it but it doesn't necessarily separate yourself from a lot of the talent pool unless you have a USP like say you're from Pinetree that's a different experience. Yeah especially in Cz.12# no vested interest in what I actually achieved, no asking for transcripts.

Pz.17#5 Pz.17# I [do] a lot of ... research on the company, any current affairs that's going on with that company... because, you know, if they ask you a question about it, it just makes you look better... like how is best to sell myself whilst also knowing enough about the company that it seems like I've invested and actually interested in the opportunity because if you come across good personally but you don't have a vested interest in the role then that's probably the last thing that they want to see.

*Pz.17#6 RTS# And did you try and find out if you knew anyone at the company...?
Pz.17# (Cz.12#) ...well I looked on the websites obviously...I didn't want to type people in LinkedIn because obviously it will show that you've viewed their profile so I didn't know if that was going to be too keen or not but I didn't really.*

Pz.17#7 Pz.17# (Cz.12#) He sat me down, introduced himself and we just had a very basic ten minute conversation and then he kind of stopped me and said 'I'll be right back sorry', and I was like 'okay', and he came back with a like a specification, so a job spec for one of the roles that they were doing at senior level so it was a director of business development... right. So he said, 'I just want you to quickly read this over and I'll give you five minutes to read this seventy-six page document' and he's like 'I'm going to be coming back in and I just want you to pitch me the role, your services and so on'.

- Pz.17#8 Pz.17# (Cz.14# internship) *I didn't have any insight or motivation, but I went for a coffee with [the lecturer] to discuss [things] and he just said three days later your name popped in my head when this guy asked if I knew anyone that wanted to do a summer placement and that turned from a summer placement into part-time [work] in my second year...*
- Pz.17#9 Pz.17# *My question to myself was, am I going to go to university to have a standard university experience... or you know the reason I wanted to go to London was to immerse myself in industry and it was the right call at the end of the day.*
- Pz.17#10 Pz.17# (Cz.12#) *...with James it was I didn't get him the job, I facilitated that first call...incentivised by you know a referral scheme internally and he had to do the rest ...James didn't have to bypass anything and that was fair, you know,[that I] facilitated that, I was asked my thoughts and relationship with him, just saying student peers but obviously we're not... RTS# You're not making the decision and you're not pressuring other people to make a decision*
Pz.17# *No I'm not and it's always nice to hear that he's doing well and stuff like that but I wasn't spending my day you know giving him tips and stuff like that. We spoke a couple of times and I said this is what executive search is but I wasn't say, you know, you need to do this ...*
- Pz.17#11 Pz.17# (Cz.19#) *so after you apply they ...[] send you off the aptitude test - obviously this is just a screening method to sort of shorten the target pool*
- Pz.17#12 Pz.17# *[It's] Incredibly competitive... if you get to the final stage and you've gone through all of that and then you have to sort of accept that someone else has got the job over you because they have an internal connection, that's not fair. But then I also don't blame them using their networks that way and it is, the networking side is huge. If you've got someone that can sort of vie[sic] for you then you're already ahead of everyone and it doesn't matter what you've done in the past... I don't think I would be here personally if I hadn't gone for coffee for [the lecturer] to give me that first internship and it's just funny how these things just add up.*
- Pz.17#13 Pz.17# *The biggest thing for me and it's not pointing the finger at anyone but you know I've come to London by myself on a whim, and with a view that I wanted to make something happen at the end of the three years and it has fortunately ... no-one can take this away from me and no-one can take the job and say that so and so has done that, and that's a nice feeling, you know, it's saying that this is all because of...*
RTS# *You've earned it*
Pz.17# *Yeah exactly*

- Pz.17#14 Pz.17# (Cz.12#) so I was sweating and you know ripping through this and kind of made as much of an effort as I could and then he said, okay we'll do the same again, I'll show you a pamphlet of Cz.12# and the services that we offer and I want you to pretend I'm a client and you try to bid it. So did that, I had no idea...I personally thought I'd not done very well and then he said, you know, I really like the sort of way you came across, you were very sort of commercial focussed and confident with what you were saying. He said, not all of it was right but the purpose is how you sort of react to this sort of on the spot kind of here you go kind of thing
- Pz.17#15 Pz.17# (Cz.12#) I probably wouldn't have got approached if I hadn't had experience prior so that...
 RTS# So that was through was Cz.14#?
 Pz.17# It was Cz.14# and I just wrote obviously a small little caption on what they do... 'executive search' and based on that I came up in search preferences...
 RTS# Oh is this through LinkedIn?
 Pz.17# Yeah so they run a search and then set up the emails that way
- Pz.17#16 Pz.17# Why is someone that might have done fantastically academically in top tier and has all these relevant internships is getting [rejected] because they don't know someone internally and I think that's just lacklustre of them and you know I don't think that's right because not everyone's got the same background. (He is referring to examples of networking he saw as nepotism he had heard about from non-Pinetree friends)
- Pz.17#17 Pz.17# (Speaking about Cz.25# from a friend) Just going on Cz.25# and Benji's experience, obviously it's a very male dominated industry, the whole... He finds that there's a lot of lower – well I say lower tier if they work for us, people coming in, you know for meetings and stuff like that, they're only there because of X Y and Z and they've bypassed a whole process and so you know, you go okay, you know, someone can vie for you but from a talent perspective for your company as a whole, is it really smart for you to bypass someone before that when really you've got people that are maybe like more proactive and you know don't have it as easy so they're willing to fight for a bit more...you know I'd rather personally take that person over so and so's son or daughter would be keen come and work...
- Pz.17#18 Pz.17# It's like you know if I'd known that two, three or four years ago, I started, would I be in a different position? But then would I be happy that I'd got that myself and so loads of questions to play
- Pz.17#19 Pz.17# The top people especially when I'm you know fortunate enough to speak to these executives across the board and it's really interesting but they are all the same calibre in the sense of you know they've done it for

the most part themselves to get where they are, it's not you know tapping someone up. But then I've also noticed how as soon as you step into work, especially in the city... it's very like, 'ah come for a drink' or 'come for this thing and you meet someone there' and then they talk and so and so. Going on a finance thing via a connection, someone at an asset management firm has said if I'd be interested in jobs and they'd love me to go and speak to them... it's funny that as soon as you step into work you see how, for the most part anyway, how things really translate via communication peer to peer and network.

ID Pz.18#

Pz.18#1 Pz.18# (Cz.20#) I think first of all analytical skills, how quickly you could really quick up or read what information we had then realise so-and-so doesn't have the same information as me, what do you have, right let's map this out, so probably our ability to observe and analyse what information we had... how we communicate as a team, maybe did we take the lead, what role did we assume within the team, I think probably was there a timekeeper, did someone bother to take the time or be the nominated writer or leader. I think how much as an individual I participated in the challenge and maybe how useful was that information to the team.

Pz.18#2 Pz.18# (Cz.20#) while I was waiting again just refreshing and making sure I was happy with my answers, so again I could just look at the question and go okay this is my answer for this. So, in the interview the interview flowed really well. Obviously there were a few things that I wasn't quite sure on or I didn't answer as well as he wanted, I'm not sure, but that technique really helped me because obviously that's what employers want to know...

RTS# And did you guess the questions roughly?

Pz.18# I was quite disappointed not more of them came up, to be honest!

Pz.18#3 Pz.18# (Cz.56#) they did provide the results of how you performed in each area and what they wanted you to do... each game obviously had a purpose and that was broken down and the score I got and what they were looking for.

RTS# So, when you said what they were looking for, the score they were looking for?

Pz.18# Yes, or they wanted higher in this area and lower in this area perhaps... [I got] some initial feedback almost straight away to see 'oh right, they wanted more of this and not this'.

- Pz.18#4 Pz.18# (Cz.20#) *So networking is something [Cz.20#] always push, usually build your network, build your network because, yeah, it helps you as an individual but also helps the business because it gets everyone else talking, communication and finding out what other people are doing in projects that are not necessarily repeat work or reinventing the wheel but actually we are constantly reinventing ourselves as a company and as individuals.*
- Pz.18#5 Pz.18# *I could have applied to more places, I feel. I know a lot of people applied to a lot of places and got through to some rounds and got rejections whatever. In my mind I felt as soon as I got an offer, and as long as I was happy with that offer, I was just going to go for it rather than keeping waiting and keep applying.*
- Pz.18#6 Pz.18# (advice) *I would want to sit down with each of them individually to understand if they have an idea what they want to do when they finish uni, what are their strengths, what are their weaknesses, what do they want to look at, what are their areas of interest. Because they always say do a degree that you're going to love doing but - yes, I agree with that to an extent - but also... you need a job.*
- Pz.18#7 Pz.18# (Cz.20#) *I wrote down all the questions I thought they might ask me depending on whether it was Cz.20#-related or whether for me personally, like my strengths, my weaknesses, some of my experiences, and then on cue cards wrote out in that format the situation, what was the task and then just memorised it and practised it that way and make it flow, so there was practice involved.*
- Pz.18#8 Pz.18# (Cz.20#) *Then what I did, as soon as I submitted, I'd applied through the website and done all the things officially online, I then got back in touch with the people I'd worked with in my gap year and said, look I've reapplied, kind of a) just to let them know but then b) if there are any helpful conversations I could have as a result*
- Pz.18#9 Pz.18# (Cz.56#) *because that was one of the first big ones I applied to, I definitely spent a lot longer on that one and what I did was I spent quite a lot of time actually with my husband's grandfather who, as part of his job before he retired was to look at CVs and creating really good CVs, and so we spent a lot of time together looking at does this make sense, how is this structured, what are you trying to communicate, what are Cz.56# looking for, okay, how can we map your experience with those areas. So I think that's also why I was quite sore about the Cz.56# one because I spent so much time on it!*
- Pz.18#10 Pz.18# (Cz.20#) *... could you do the role, do you have the technical ability to do X, Y, Z. So, from these initial tests I think just that basic ability of can I do some basic judgements and numerical reasoning and just understanding my way of thinking, how I approach a certain situation.*

- Pz.18#11 Pz.18# [on the online games] (Cz.56#) They were also kind of like puzzles, you know how quickly could you put the items in the box... Some of it was really quite random, what were they trying to get at. Some said 'how quickly can you analyse the picture or situation and then provide an answer' so some of it was more analytical and the speed with which you could observe and pick things up. One of them generally was how quickly you could press the button as such... so I don't quite know what that was trying to get at...
- Pz.18#12 Pz.18# (Cz.20#) Slightly stressful because I think what I find stressful about presenting is if you don't know what you're talking about, that's when... it's... noticeable... of course we all knew as a team what we wanted to discuss – we had planned it and prepared it, but...we don't work for Cz.20# and of course they knew that but still that thinking of should I have known more going into the interview or the presentation... but I just thought that this is maybe looking [more at] teamwork, how we communicate, how we do under pressure but also, you know, can we present, how do we present as well. So I was thinking, well that bit I can do, you know... but then again it's one of those weird things you get kind of a buzz afterwards of doing it, I think, because it's quite fast paced and you just do it and phew okay...
- Pz.18#13 Pz.18# (Cz.20#) I went smart casual so I wore a skirt, a black top, flat shoes and a sort of casual jacket but it could be borderline, it could be smarter or more casual... it was one of the smarter things I had with me at uni and I liked the skirt that I had so I thought...and I felt comfortable in it and it was something that wasn't new, so I thought don't wear something new because a) you might not necessarily feel comfortable in it or don't wear new shoes because they'll rub and then you'll be thinking about that rather than just focussing on what you need to remember for the interview and things like that. Maybe I did want a bit more of the feminine side and just be different from the guys that were going to be there, but not a huge amount of thought, just more of what's kind of smart but am I relaxed in and feel comfortable in
- Pz.18#14 Pz.18# I think what I found useful was being pointed in directions I hadn't thought of, so particular areas that I hadn't realised were options or companies I hadn't heard of, so what I would love to be able to... provide for [students] are options that they hadn't necessarily thought of... trying to yeah just show them what else is out there
- Pz.18#15 Pz.18# (on Cz.20#) a lot of the business people I've met, everyone's very similar in one sense: the go-getting, you take the initiative, you know, a lot of the time people have gone out their way to help me in certain areas so being willing to help others, to you know, thinking out side of the box is kind of a cliché term but building your network, having the ability to build your network and get involved in things so that you can then draw in

experience and expertise from other areas and in that was it opens up opportunities for you but also can open up opportunities for others

Pz.18#16 Pz.18# (Cz.56#) *I think also just because it was one of the first ones I applied for and I spent quite a bit of time on the CV, trying to tailor it to exactly what I think they're looking for and making it relevant to them and why I want to work for [them] and the fact that they wouldn't even look at that, but that's the whole job-hunting process and you'll have rejection after rejection and you'll spend time on various applications so that was part of the learning curve of, okay this is going to be part of it, so that was just a learning curve for me.*

Pz.18#17 Pz.18# (Cz.56#) *Yeah, it was definitely fun and different, which I liked compared to the other applications I've done*

ID Pz.19#

Pz.19#1 Pz.19# (Cz.37#) *I really, really liked it. Purely because it's also what happens when you work within a team. So it was very grounded in the sense that ok this is what happens when you're part of an HR team or any team that you work with. You may have an idea that you think is absolutely brilliant but somebody else might think, 'oh it's absolute rubbish' and you know, it's against this policy or we can't do it for that specific reason. And working with people who you don't know was also very nice because at the same time, one of them, I remember... I was- like, prodding him to answer questions because he was so nervous. The other person was confident. And just like having to get them to open up and although they were very knowledgeable, but they lacked the confidence in terms of communicating with somebody else. So it was also very interesting to see how other people react to the situation.*

Pz.19#2 Pz.19# (Cz.33#) *It was a role-play about, so if I was the manager and then somebody had come to me with a grievance, you know, what would I do in that situation?... so I had to step in [to the team leader's] shoes. So basically it was, you know, 'what would you do in this situation? How would you cope with it? What do you think would be the best approach?'... But what I did before hand, I actually read through about their company and, you know, what sort of attributes they are looking for in the person and what is it they promote as a company. And I remembered in the role-play and I had to advise that you know, as a company these are you know, the qualities that we look out for in a person. And that was very well received by the Manager, who actually made a point to say, 'We've never*

had somebody whose actually looked up in so much detail and actually pulled that in the role-play before... Never'

- Pz.19#3 Pz.19# (Cz.23#) *A lot of companies obviously point... at the ability to be able to fit in with those who you're working with so I think that was of you know, high importance to them...*
- Pz.19#4 Pz.19# *I suppose again that I learned to understand that you are actually your own brand so you have to position yourself in a way that the person who's interviewing you has confidence in you, you know. How you present yourself, look your best when you go to the interview, dress appropriately and obviously no jeans, you know. If you're applying for a corporate position, it's corporate wear. If you're applying to a company that's a bit relaxed I would still you know be, smart... my take on it would be the person is looking at you, obviously appearances makes a difference and first impression counts. So it's how you present yourself to them so I was always smartly dressed and tidy and on time.*
- Pz.19#5 Pz.19# (Cz.23#) (Pinetree) *Having the chance to actually get employers in and actually speaking to them... [about] how their system actually picks up on key words. So I had to highlight the key words that were posted in... the particular job description I was applying... to make sure that I don't actually lose out on the key words if ever there was a system in place that would just scan it and accept or reject the application... Because you know getting the chance to speak with employers who have like over a thousand applications a day whilst I was studying my business degree, was a real eye opener in terms of how it actually works and how your CV goes from the process of being submitted to actually being called for an interview.*
- Pz.19#6 Pz.19# (Cz.33#) *[It] was pretty nerve wracking because that was my first experience of actually role-playing for a job interview, which I thought was pretty funny afterwards. But, it was also good in the sense that it was different from your usual, you know, job application/ interview process... you know when you send in your CV, yes you may or not receive a phone call or an email to say whether you've been shortlisted or not and then you go to your usual psychometric you know, test or assessment days etc, but this was very different- very, very different. And it was actually quite fun!*
- Pz.19#7 Pz.19# (Cz.37#) *it made sense because like she explained is sometimes you would have an idea that you think would work well, but another person in your team may not think so. So... it was not just a question of pitching your idea but also trying to, I think, find out whether you could actually collaborate with other people with differing ideas. Which was really great. And we presented so there was three of us in a group, and it was me and two other guys, and we did a short presentation, which was about ten minutes, and yeah so that went really well.*

- Pz.19#8 Pz.19# (Cz.33#) *I would actually say that it was quite daunting and challenging at the same time. But I suppose it's also the fact that they wanted to find out whether if you were put on the spot, how would you react to it? This is my take on it*
- Pz.19#9 Pz.19# (Pinetree) *But I also learnt that and this is where I had a laugh with my close friends and I said do you know what, we're all like Tesco, because every little helps. So every little thing that you've done, whether it's throughout the studies whether it was through an industry day, you know, it all helps and contributes to what you want to do later on in life. And I suppose using examples like, 'I've been to this employer, I've done that before, I've worked with you know, big names... organising you know interview skills day, and I've done you know, workshops or I won an award at Blackberry'... And so it was those things, you know that differentiates you from everybody else because what you've got to remember... is this is not your bog standard university. You're getting you know, industry days, you're getting different opportunities that probably millions of students out there don't get. And it's use it to your own advantage.*
- Pz.19#10 Pz.19# (Cz.23#) *I would say, you know the research, tailoring your cover letter but also making sure that those key words that they are looking for appear in your statement or in your CV so then you get, you know, filtered through to the next round.*

ID Pz.20#

- Pz.20#1 Pz.20# (Cz.21#) *So that was quite nerve wracking ... there was a lot of data to go through, even though the questions were quite targeted, so it was a case of working through the data and working out where I was going to be getting the answers from and then preparing the answers on PowerPoint... it was a real set of client questions that they've had like years ago and that was actually really, really interesting and I enjoyed the task*
- Pz.20#2 Pz.20# *I think that often having a degree is quite a standard requirement for going for certain jobs, for example if I was going for a graduate role even though [my] experience might be more valuable to them if it's a graduate role I need to be a graduate [laughs] and so having a degree is something that I guess is one of the foundations when it comes to... making sure you can get past being screened for a role, I would say. It's one of those... and I don't want to put down the value of a degree but I feel a hygiene factor might be a way to rub it in [sic] from my experiences .*

- Pz.20#3 Pz.20# So it's quite a cliché but always make sure I'm smiling...
 RTS# And why do you deliberately make sure you're smiling?
 Pz.20# Because if you're quite positive then it just makes for a nicer experience and also I think it makes a better impression on the interviewer just generally just being warm and friendly and chatty
- Pz.20#4 Pz.20# (Cz.06#) I remember actually when I was looking to become a research assistant at the Cz.06# I spoke to someone I'd worked within in the department and... I said... 'what are my prospects in getting a job here afterwards' and she said... 'as a typical candidate your grades might not be enough'... she said 'that is something you might be screened out on, however, if you are going for it let me know and I might be able to speak to HR about it', so it's things like that [make networking important].
- Pz.20#5 Pz.20# (Cz.21#) I was in a fortunate position that I was able to speak to my existing colleagues who were able to help me with doing my presentation... I practised it with my colleagues... speaking to people who already work in that industry it's a lot easier because they know what they're looking for whereas if you're speaking to strangers who don't understand or aren't familiar with it then you're at less of an advantage, so I'm glad because it definitely helped.
- Pz.20#6 RTS# And do you think that's fair?
 Pz.20# What the whole concept of 'it's who you know not what you know'? [laughs]... no I don't think it's fair but then...though I think that once you are in, in any kind of job then the onus is on you to like...you then have the opportunity to network. I just think it's in that bit before when you're still in your studies... Yeah I think if you've built your network from taking advantages from opportunities that you have in a work situation where if, you know, if you don't speak to them then you've lost that opportunity, as opposed to say even if you don't speak to them your parents might know them or someone else that you know might know them, there is a difference in those two
 RTS# So it's sort of networking by merit is actually fine and is a reflection of your work
 Pz.20# I would say that, yeah
- Pz.20#7 Pz.20# (Cz.01#) I started with my mentoring session which was nice because that was the one I was most nervous about... It was under observation by one of the teachers and I was introduced to these four students... real students, real sixth form students, Year 12s, and I sat with them in... one of their study rooms as there were other students around but it was just me and these students were the focus and so I asked them about how they felt about the topic and how confident they were and then we did a couple of past questions, which is what I'd prepared, and then at

the end I asked them how they felt about it now and they felt more confident so I took that as a positive.

- Pz.20#8 *RTS# Whereas a network that someone else has given to you is kind of...
Pz.20# But it's not for me to then say that you're not allowed to use a network that happens to be already instilled in your life, ... so if I was say like an employer and I knew my colleague's son for example wanted a job, can we give him an interview, that kind of situation versus, 'oh there is an apprentice or a graduate who seems really engaged and who's already expressed an interest, she may not have experience but I've heard good things about her', in those kind of situations I think go for the one who's already in the business or who's already out of their own right gone and spoken to people, as opposed to a colleague's child*
- Pz.20#9 *Pz.20# (Pinetree) There'll always be hoops to jump through and there'll always be screeners and if you can't get through the screeners just on the basis of what you've got in your degree you need some sort of help and actually that's something that – I know this isn't the purpose of this interview but something that Pinetree do well – is having that kind of opportunity to even though, yes, you may be studying full-time, you are exposed to businesses and people who you can build in your network who later can help you with that process, as I do think it is kind of stacked against you [poor school grades] and you're kind of stuck between a rock and a hard place... Because even if your experience falls slightly short or it is quite limited if you've got someone on the inside so to speak at a company you might want to work for in the industry that you help you with a foot through the door.*
- Pz.20#10 *Pz.20# (Cz.21#) They did ask questions on the presentation to sort of ... not to criticise necessarily but just to probe and see if I was able to defend what I'd written so sort of questions on my approaches and it didn't feel like they thought I was wrong, it just more felt like they wanted to know if I would stand my ground in what I'd said which I felt quite confident in but... I wouldn't be surprised if some people found that quite hard and quite intimidating because you don't always know the angle that they're coming at and whether they really do disagree with what you said or if they are just trying to see how well you can handle being questioned about something that you've done.*
- Pz.20#11 *Pz.20# I think the onus is on the employer and the recruitment people to make sure that when they are looking for candidates they are looking for people who express an interest or build a network for themselves rather than someone pulling in a favour so it's more of a top-down attitude.*
- Pz.20#12 *Pz.20# (Cz.06#) So the task was not one that I prepared or was able to prepare for because you're given it in the interview and that was you were*

given some audience figures and some other data and asked...and told you're in a situation where you've just been given all this data and you've got twenty minutes to summarise and present back the key facts

- Pz.20#13 Pz.20# (Cz.21#) the NHS is trying to convince people to become organ donors, here are some data about people's perceptions about organ donation and other things and just talk about the barriers and what I recommend the NHS do in order to overcome these and it was a real set of client questions that they've had like years ago and that was actually really, really interesting and I enjoyed the task*
- Pz.20#14 Pz.20# (Cz.06#) They asked a question about what challenges I think they're facing at the moment... for those kind of questions I think they're trying to work out if you actually are interested in what you're applying for and if you've done your research around it rather than just sort of going for the job that you liked the look of, because it's those kind of questions where you actually do need to do a bit of digging and research beforehand to be able to answer it properly*
- Pz.20#15 Pz.20# (Cz.21#) I think initially I knew I wanted to work for an agency as I was thinking about who we have on our roster at the Cz.06# who would be...[unclear] to work for, Cz.21# came up and actually the first sort of touch into that was my...the head of my team at the Cz.06# that happened to know someone that is quite senior at Cz.21# which is quite common... in the research world people will go from agency to client and just know each other and she told me that there were...I didn't necessarily get an interview through her but it was definitely sort of like a first touch with the company*
- Pz.20#16 Pz.20# (Cz.01#) actually my friend who I mentioned before who had worked at that school, she put me in contact with one of the teachers who said he was willing to have a chat with me after I'd done some preparation for the session and I could ask him questions so that was massively, massively helpful because I was a bit confused initially*
- Pz.20#17 Pz.20# (Cz.06#) Had I got onto the apprenticeship scheme itself through someone that I knew that wouldn't have been fair. That's not to say I wouldn't have done, not because it's not fair but I think that because I took the opportunities while I was there that's how it sort of worked out*
- Pz.20#18 Pz.20# (Cz.06#) Once you are in, which I got through getting onto the apprenticeship scheme, that's when you build your networks, that's me speaking to my colleagues and expressing the kind of interests in the jobs I wanted later and using them rather than just coasting ... I was expressing my interest from the very beginning about the kind of things I was interested in, so later when I went back to them, they knew I was already interested.*

Pz.20#19 Pz.20# I think whilst you're studying it's to start getting and building your network and having sort of your...because I got those from being within my job and speaking to my colleagues but if you've got, you know, lecturers or other people who can help you in sort of building those networks around where you could get some experience even if it is things like a placement week in your reading week for example, things like that, anything like that is really helpful because as soon as someone knows your name then they might be able to push you through an application, the application process a bit faster or help you maybe get past certain things.

ID Pz.21#

Pz.21#1 Pz.21# (Cz.44#) these guys are getting just a little insight there of it, a little task out of it for free, they're getting a value added plan that's going to make us millions, right, so they put this situation up to so make a package for us and see how you do but they're actually looking for a package, so now they've collated all this information, be like 'guys look at this, definitely we can make money out of this'... these guys yeah send 'em off...that's how I think it goes, right, and I used to think corporates aren't like that you know, oh they care about equal opportunities and...that's not how it works.

Pz.21#2 Pz.21# (Cz.44#) so there's eight of us and there's twelve of them, yeah four here, four there, and four there [pointing around the room]...honestly it was like we don't know who's looking at who.

Pz.21#3 Pz.21# (Santadner) Especially because I had two on my right shoulder, two on my left shoulder here when I was speaking to people so it was like you know you can feel them burning behind you.

Pz.21#4 Pz.21# (Cz.44#) In the afternoon it was a lot more specific to do with the banking sector, right. You're given like a brief, something to do with debit card it was...[and] they were saying, 'right you've got this kind of customer', a student I think, you had a business customer and then you had like another international customer or something and then you had four or five products, 'allocate a product to each with a recommendation of why that person fits with that product and then create a new product for each and then a one size fits all product that you can do using only four options'... so you're building packages essentially

Pz.21#5 Pz.21# (Cz.44#) it was very competency based, it was just I feel like another fact checker but just another screening thing, have a look at how he speaks, have a look at how he presents himself, things like that.

- Pz.21#6 Pz.21# (restaurant) So I saw a space in my sister's company, I was like 'hold on a minute, I can do your branding, it's all wrong', or 'I can do your stock-taking, right, or readjust your supplies' because the supplies were aged...they hadn't changed in three or four years, they were paying them like three grand a month more than they really should have been and the reason why they're not paying that [any more] is because of me. So I saw the space and I put myself forward and I told her I was going to do this, 'whether you need it or not I'm going to do it. If you don't want to pay me you don't have to pay me but the money you save you will be able to see the value of it'. I did that.
- Pz.21#7 RTS# So they never actually told you, you had to actually contact them to find out?
Pz.21# (Cz.44#) I got an email instantly saying, 'oh we'll process you're contact request, someone in the team will get back to you soon', all right... honestly I wanted to destroy my laptop, I was like 'are you serious I spent that hundred and fifty pounds up in Leicester, I wasted that whole day doing shitty ice breaking challenges, put everything into that for you to not even give me a definite answer'... it's not like I was sure I was going to get it, it's just tell me straight away that you're not going to get it, let me know, don't try and ease me down all right and I got a few other responses like, 'unfortunately you were like in line for it' – this is a different company, – 'oh, unfortunately we had one person that'...I don't want to know that there was one person that had beaten me, just tell me I was part of the hundred that didn't get through, right because that's just going to hurt me even more and honestly that stuck with me because I was so wired up at just the whole process of it all.
- Pz.21#8 Pz.21# So I thought I've got to do it myself and I wouldn't you know wouldn't have done that a year ago, I would have just conformed, you know I've got a 2:2 oh you know my CV's not that strong or my degree's not that strong, I'm going to have to join the queue and it's made me realise, who says I've got to join the queue, why don't I just skip to the front, that's what I'm doing so now I'm trying to pull my strings now so that I can get this job.
- Pz.21#9 Pz.21# A company doesn't want to hire somebody who's having a hard life, as bad as that sounds, trust me big corporates don't want anything to do with someone who's having mental issues. Although they say 'we hire everyone' that's bullshit, right, bullshit because working with board level people, having board members in my family, bullshit, right. If you're having mental issues and you've got someone who's a lot more happy in the company we don't want someone who's always coming in with a drugged smile... because we feel like that's going to rub off of people. I've done some recruiting myself, right, I try and disregard that stuff but you

have to start thinking about HR things like behavioural issues and how that one person, a bad fruit, can affect the whole bunch, right.

- Pz.21#10 Pz.21# (Cz.44#) *Literally it blew my mind in how silly it was, right, like very basic getting to know people, kind of what you do in a classroom on the first day of school, right, things like that.*
- Pz.21#11 Pz.21# (Cz.18#) *you know before the internship I went and had dinner with her a couple of times, right*
RTS# *After she made the job offer?*
Pz.21# *After that yeah just because I felt that I wanted to create more of a rapport with her before I went into that business just to know that I'm on the right track or I don't turn up to work wearing a sharp suit...*
- Pz.21#12 Pz.21# (Cz.44#) *At the time I was applying there were loads and loads and loads at a time and you don't have much time to wait and when you do wait and you've got loads on, you miss the deadline day because you don't know what's coming in the week and you end up getting busy and you realise oh I missed [it]...all that effort.*
- Pz.21#13 Pz.21# (Cz.18# – general job) *It was almost a relief that someone's kind of accepting my personal kind of attributes and my characteristics rather than what I've written on a piece of paper, right, than what a CV and cover letter can show*
- Pz.21#14 Pz.21# (Cz.03# – general job) *when I applied I got called straight away, they said 'yeah come in', the lady on the phone was like 'oh so I saw you did this [social enterprise project], great that must have been amazing', and we're talking about and I'm thinking like she actually appreciates what I've done.*
- Pz.21#15 Pz.21# (Cz.03#) *I've gone in and I've waited around, did an interview and it was that quick... and she's just sitting there like she doesn't want to know anything about me*
- Pz.21#16 Pz.21# (Cz.03#) *On the Monday I saw every single one. It was like, 'oh congratulations, you got a job', but then I suddenly realised what's going on, every week they have fifteen to twenty people in there.*
RTS# *Oh yeah, they give the job to everybody, is what you're saying*
Pz.21# *Yeah, anyone who turns up, yeah. So they advertise that as a graduate role whereas the guy next to me had just finished A-levels, there was a girl next to me who had just finished her GCSEs*
- Pz.21#17 Pz.21# (Cz.44#) *It was basically, what I got from them was keeping us busy while they're doing their back room kind of like, I don't know, profiling analysis et cetera but it was a way to keep us busy for them so for example if they went and got me there was only two people interviewing...it was like six people in the room at a time...we wouldn't get bored so we're not*

just sitting in an empty room waiting for our name to get called so that's always a good way to keep you know you occupied.

- Pz.21#18 Pz.21# (Cz.44#) *So the first task was like getting to know everyone so write something...write a secret about yourself on a post-it note, scrunch it up and throw it into the middle of the room*
RTS# [laughs]
Pz.21#... *Go in, pick one up, if it's your own, throw it back in without being caught, but you pick one up and read it and you had to like guess or like go around the class...the room and talk to people, like is this...you go up to who you think it is and if it is you're talking about your life experience, things like that. That was a good kind of icebreaker, I guess.*
- Pz.21#19 Pz.21# (Cz.44#) *she asked me more about me as a person, what I like to do like outside of work, what I do with friends, and then work experience. Literally everything I had answered already in the application she wanted to hear it from my mouth basically because that's what most employers I've been to do that*
- Pz.21#20 Pz.21# *It's like it's not what you know it's who you know, right what you know means one per cent, right, I could have done a [completely different] degree here and got the job that I'm doing now, right, because it's who you know*

ID Pz.22#

- Pz.22#1 Pz.22# *I think people like to work with people they know or they know of or they've got some experience with... because some people can interview very well... though they're not the right fit for the job but I think if you already know someone you can visualise how they're going to fit in or if they're going to get along in your company or organisation, you just know if they're going to be a fit, you get a good feeling.*
- Pz.22#2 Pz.22# (ideas for students) *networking skills, talking about how to network, how to get yourself out there in the position where you might get offered more jobs or what sort of events you would be attending, should you be joining societies or clubs if you're interested in going down a certain route.*
- Pz.22#3 Pz.22# (Cz.47#) *so in front of three people, so the area manager, the centre manager and someone else who I can't remember at the moment, I had to teach them something, so I had to do like ten minutes where I would teach them a skill and I think they just wanted to see how I would*

come across and how I would relate to students so I taught them how to shuffle cards [laughs]. So I took a deck of cards and I just demonstrated how to shuffle cards and of course they loved that so I was you know... Yeah so I ended up teaching employability skills and customer service, it was really weird.

Pz.22#4 Pz.22# There's the connections you make I think when you do a business degree. I mean I've seen it with the younger ones, how they all kind of you know connect with each other and fire off ideas and so many of them have gone on to start businesses together or get involved in businesses together... it's sort of to feel at ease within that world and to feel that it's accessible to you

Pz.22#7 Pz.22# You know it's often been like that for me, very strangely, it tends to come through word of mouth and I think probably a lot of the jobs I've had have, yeah I've been approached...It's great, isn't it, if that can happen. I mean my mum says to me, Anne you're so lucky, like these jobs just come to you but I think also... if I hadn't updated my LinkedIn profile... it's taught me that yeah it's always good to keep people informed about what you're doing now because that does help... yeah I haven't really had to go through any kind of lengthy interviews or difficult processes – I've been lucky!

Pz.22#8 Pz.22# Not everyone gets their ideal job, even people that are out there being very proactive and searching for jobs, a lot of them are compromising a lot anyway on, you know on the jobs they're going for or the jobs they're accepting so I think me being not so proactive and taking what comes my way is probably not such a terrible thing.

ID Pz.23#

Pz.23#1 Pz.23# (Cz.45#) I actually think it's probably likely going to be, not that process, but there's going to be part of that process which is actually seeing the people live working and using that as an assessment, more than interviews, more than traditional interviews. I think that will probably start to have its way either into internship recruitment or normal recruitment, it's watching people in their natural environment, I don't know quite how that will work but I feel like that is a stronger way of assessing someone or a different way of assessing someone than a traditional interview.

- Pz.23#2 Pz.23# (Cz.45#) *it's unique... and yeah I think it's time and a place, you know I was very lucky to be in that class, in this year with him teaching, finding that interest, I think there's a lot of coincidental luck, to be honest, but there was an opportunity that clearly presented itself and there was still work needed to be done on my part to actually go and get it.*
- Pz.23#3 Pz.23# (Cz.45#) *[the lecturer] actually, when he interviewed me for Pinetree, he said 'why do you want to come to Pinetree' and I gave a spiel about why I wanted to come to Pinetree and he joked and said, 'ah you should come and work in marketing for my company' and I took that and thought actually that would be really cool. He was joking but clearly I had done something... Well ... clearly he wasn't joking but clearly I'd done something which had impressed him somehow and I thought actually there might be a chance...*
- Pz.23#4 Pz.23# (Cz.45#) *Oh I think because[he]I thought that I was...I tend to have quite a lot of energy in seminars and lectures anyway but I think I...I knew I wanted to work with him and I think [he] probably saw that*
- Pz.23#7 Pz.23# (Cz.45#) *just before first year ended for summer... [we] went for a walk, went for a coffee and he said 'do you want to come on board and do some projects over the summer', so do you want an internship essentially... so I started to do an internship, did an internship, did the whole summer, came back and [he] said, 'you've been really, really good, do you want to continue to do some projects'... so I just invoiced [him] on a monthly basis... and, yeah, over Christmas in my third year we sat down, I said 'it's been a really great two years or eighteen months, I'd really like to carry on' and [he] said, 'yeah absolutely, I'd like to go and do a consultation within the organisation to make sure everyone else is happy with it' and then a month later we had another meeting and he said 'yeah'*

Appendix 4 - Phone survey instrument

The survey instrument used for the phone survey of N=47 Participants.

Organisational information

Name:

Date of Interview:

Time of Interview:

Interview Method:

Total Interview Time:

Did they participate in the DLHE survey:

Phone Number:

Confirm you have explained the research project, and that they agree to take part:

Substantive Questions

NOTE: in much of the survey there is a pattern of asking an open question first to get their unprompted response, and then followed by a checklist. Don't prompt in the open questions as we want their intuitive responses.

Description of final year project:

Script: I'm now going to ask you a few questions about what you're doing now

NOTE: if they offer additional info and details throughout the survey make a note.

1. What's your current job title/what are you doing now? (refer to their DLHE answer or Linked In profile but check it is still correct)

2. Who is your current employer/s? (Please get details: broad location (ie London), FT or PT, freelancer (or contract) or permanent, and how long they have had that job?)

3. What do you think were the most important things that helped you to get your current job? (If they aren't working, ask: 'what are the most important things that would help you to get a job?') (*open question*)

Prompt if they don't mention skills or qualifications: 'what about skills and qualifications? What do you think were the most important skills or qualifications in getting your current job?'

4. How long did it take you to find your 1st graduate job? ie how long were you actually job-hunting for?

5. Are you in further study at the moment? (*if so get details of what*)

6. Why did you decide to undertake this further study? (*open question*)

NOTE: They could be working and in further study. They could have more than one job.

Script: Now I'm just going to ask you a few questions about how many jobs you've applied for post-graduation:

NOTE: Not all jobs they've ever had or applied for but those for post-graduation. They may have started applying before they finished their studies. We are interested in the jobs they attempted to get for their post-graduation lives.

7. How many jobs have you applied for (to date)?
8. How many job offers have you received?
9. For how many jobs did you get to a first round interview?
10. For how many jobs did you get to a second round interview?

NOTE: I have assumed interviews but if they say they did something else then find out in how job applications did they get to the 1st and 2nd stage of the process.

NOTE: Approximate numbers are OK throughout the survey if they are not sure – but encourage as much accuracy as possible so give them time to think.

Script: Great, thanks. I'm going to ask you a few questions now about your job-hunting experiences and what you were asked to do:

11. As part of your graduate job-hunting have you experienced any of the following (please give a number or percentage of relevant job applications for each):
 - a. Writing a covering letter or email
 - b. Submitting your CV
 - c. Filling in an application form
 - d. Giving a presentation (video, oral or other)
 - e. A team-working exercise
 - f. A written communication exercise (other than a covering letter/email, CV or application form)
 - g. A test or exam (eg an online or paper test)
 - h. An assessment day
 - i. Any other activity/ task (specify what)

NOTE: Whenever we ask about job applications we mean each job applied for. If they did 3 interviews for 1 application that counts as 1, 3 interviews for 3 different applications counts as 3.

12. For your current job: which of the following did you experience?

- a. Writing a covering letter/email
- b. Submitting your CV
- c. Filling in an application form
- d. Giving a presentation (video or oral)
- e. A team-working exercise
- f. A written communication exercise (other than a covering letter, CV or application form)
- g. A test or exam (eg an online or paper test)
- h. An assessment day
- i. Any other activity/ task (specify what)

13. What were the most common questions that you were asked in interviews?
(open question)

- a.
- b.
- c.
- d.
- e.

14. Did you discuss any of the following topics in your interviews, or were you specifically asked about them in any job application forms (as opposed to listing them on your CV)?
- a. Commercial matters in the news or anything about business awareness and knowledge
 - b. Attitude to/experience of customers and clients
 - c. Work experience
 - d. What questions were you asked in relation to work experience?

SCRIPT: I am now going to ask you about your experience at Pinetree:

15. What things in your Pinetree degree experience have been most helpful so far in getting a job? (open question) (probe for details, and explanation of why they think it was helpful)
- a.
 - b.
 - c.
 - d.
16. What things in your Pinetree degree experience have been most helpful so far in performing in your job? (probe as above) (open question)
- a.
 - b.
 - c.
 - d.
17. In hindsight, what are the top 2 – 3 things that you would change about (or add to) your experience at Pinetree, to help you in your career (getting a job, doing well in your job)? (probe for details and explanation of why the change would be helpful)
- a.
 - b.
 - c.
 - d.

18. Did you do an internship while at Pinetree? (*Get brief details*)

19. Did you work/volunteer/set up your own business while you were studying at Pinetree (*get brief details*)

20. How well did your recent course prepare you for employment? (*use DLHE options for answer*)

- a. Very well
- b. Well
- c. Not very well
- d. Not at all
- e. Can't tell

Follow up questions

SCRIPT: So that's the end of the survey questions, we now have some housekeeping questions.

We may have follow up questions based on your answers, are you happy for us to contact you if we need to clarify something? And what is the best way to do so? (*Email address*)

Once we have done our first stage analysis we will also be asking some of our graduates to take part a 1:1 interview so that we can ask discuss their experience and ideas in more detail. Subject to finding a convenient time and location, would you be potentially interested in taking part? (*We can go to them*)

Would you be happy to share a copy of your latest CV with me? We are collecting CVs as part of the evidence base for the research. (*Give details of your email address, so they can send it over*)

Would you like to be sent a copy of the final report?

Appendix 5 - Question and prompt sheet for research interviews

The interview instrument used as a guide for the research interviewees of N=23 Participants.

Name

Date

Time

Location

Preparation: Check interviewer has latest CV/linkedin profile, phone survey answers.
Recording equipment

Introduction

Explain purpose and topic of research – that it is about exploring the reality of job-hunting for recent business graduates, and will be used for a doctorate and other purposes such as publication, training students, presentations and on the website and brochures, that direct quotes will be used but both Participants and companies will be anonymised. Confirm they are happy to take part on this basis. Confirm current job, outline how the interview will work, check recording is working, see if they have any questions.

Check basic data from micro survey: countable data

Stage one: The process experienced in job-hunting

SCRIPT: Let's choose three applications to focus on. For each, could you describe the process, telling me about each stage? *(NOTE: Use a fresh sheet for each application)*

Question 1: Description of process?

Prompts: can you describe the overall process?

Question 2: What did you think of this experience?

Prompts: How did this experience make you feel? What did you think employers were looking for with each stage of the process? Did you think this was a fair and effective process?

Question 3: What do you think was key on getting or missing out on this job?

Prompts: How important was the degree itself? (having a degree, the subjects, the grades, the dissertation etc). What else was important?

Ask these three questions for three applications.

Application 1:

Application 2:

Application 3:

Stage 2 Your overall approach to job-hunting

In this second set of questions I'd like to find out about your overall approach to job-hunting

Question 4: Tell me about how you went about job-hunting

Prompts: How do you find positions to apply for? How do you prepare for your interviews? Dress? Research of the company? Other? Did you ask the advice of friends or relatives?

Question 5: Let's have a look at your CV/LinkedIn profile. Can you talk me through it?

Prompts: the CV itself will act as a prompt, and try and explore why they have written it the way they have and why they have chosen to emphasise certain things

Stage 3 Work experience during degree study

In this next stage I'd like to explore what sort of work experience you had while studying, and what sort of effect it had on getting a job and on your studies

Question 6: Can you describe for me any work experience, internship, volunteering or anything similar you did while studying?

Prompts: The phone survey will say whether they had an internship or did voluntary work while at Pinetree, but without much detail. Here prompt for details and also ask about any other work they did while studying.

Did you work at all while you were studying? What did you do and how much? Did it affect your studies at all? Did your study help with your job at all?

Stage 4 the role of the university

In this final part I'd like to discuss with you how you think university study should contribute to you getting a job.

Question 7: Why did you decide to study a business degree?

Prompts: why did you choose to study business? Why Pinetree?

Question 8: What effect did your experience on your business degree have on your job-hunting experience?

Prompts: What things helped? What could have been done differently by your business school that would have helped more?

Question 9: What do you see as the purpose of a business school or a university?

SCRIPT: And our very last question

Question 10: What advice would you give a student/graduate now on how to get a job after graduating?

Prompt: If you were in charge of 10 current students and their employment prospects, what would you do? What tips could you give them?

Appendix 6 - Company codes

Pinetree refers to the higher education provider that is the basis of this case study and Big Pine refers to its corporate owner. The remaining companies referenced by the Participants have been given numerical codes as set out below.

Participants	Company Code	Description
Pz.20#	Cz.01#	UK educational sixth form college
Pz.11#	Cz.02#	UK small recruitment consultancy
Pz.21#	Cz.03#	UK small marketing and advertising
Pz.08#	Cz.04#	Worldwide very large supermarket retailer
Pz.17#	Cz.05#	Worldwide FTSE investment bank and financial services company
Pz.20#	Cz.06#	Worldwide very large public service broadcaster
Pz.09#	Cz.07#	Worldwide very large consultancy company
Pz.02#	Cz.08#	Worldwide Small/ Medium recruitment consultancy
Pz.11#	Cz.09#	UK regional marketing co
Pz.04#	Cz.10#	UK technology start-up
Pz.14#	Cz.11#	UK Small/ Medium multimedia sales house
Pz.17#	Cz.12#	Worldwide Medium recruitment company
Pz.10#	Cz.13#	UK small charity
Pz.17#	Cz.14#	UK small recruitment company
Pz.09#	Cz.15#	Worldwide very large data science company
Pz.11#	Cz.16#	Worldwide very large technology enterprise
Pz.07##	Cz.17#	Worldwide FTSE transport group
Pz.21#	Cz.18#	UK & Middle East Medium/Large communications company
Pz.17#	Cz.19#	Worldwide FTSE banking and financial services company
Pz.01#, Pz.18#, Pz.10#	Cz.20#	Worldwide very large information technology company

Pz.20#	Cz.21#	UK Large Market Research company
Pz.32#	Cz.22#	IT company
Pz.19#	Cz.23#	UK medium financial services company
Pz.03#	Cz.24#	UK small e learning design and production company
Pz.17#, Pz.02#, Pz.28#	Cz.25#	UK FTSE retail and commercial bank
Pz.03#	Cz.26#	Worldwide FTSE retailer
Pz.14#	Cz.27#	Marketing company
Pz.01#	Cz.28#	UK large counter intelligence and security services
Pz.29#	Cz.29#	Worldwide - food and beverage company
Pz.05#	Cz.30#	Worldwide FTSE retailer
Pz.13#	Cz.31#	Worldwide very large broadcast media company
Pz.09#	Cz.32#	UK medium retailer
Pz.19#	Cz.33#	unknown
Pz.02#	Cz.34#	UK small education management company
Pz.05#, Pz.15#, Pz.10#, Pz.12#	Cz.35#	UK small higher education provider
Pz.08#, Pz.02#	Cz.36#	Worldwide FTSE educational company
Pz.19#	Cz.37#	Pharmaceutical company
Pz.08#	Cz.38#	unknown
Pz.08#	Cz.39#	UK Very large retail and finance company
Pz.11#	Cz.40#	UK Medium food and beverage company
Pz.24#	Cz.41#	Worldwide very large clothing retailer
Pz.17#	Cz.42#	UK/ Worldwide FTSE banking and financial services
Pz.07##, Pz.15#	Cz.43#	UK FTSE retailer
Pz.21#	Cz.44#	Worldwide very large financial and banking services

Pz.06#, Pz.23#	Cz.45#	UK SME information technology company
Pz.14#	Cz.46#	Worldwide very large broadcaster
Pz.22#	Cz.47#	UK government department
Pz.10#	Cz.48#	Worldwide very large entertainment company
Pz.01#	Cz.49#	European very large information technology company
Pz.13#	Cz.50#	European large software engineer recruitment company
Pz.02#	Cz.51#	Worldwide aerospace information technology company
Pz.02#	Cz.52#	UK FTSE housebuilding company
Pz.05#	Cz.53#	Worldwide very large newspaper and website
Pz.04#	Cz.54#	Worldwide large information technology and services company
Pz.15#	Cz.55#	Worldwide very large retailer
Pz.03#, Pz.18#, Pz.14#	Cz.56#	Worldwide FTSE consumer goods company
Pz.25#	Cz.57#	UK elite large higher education institution
Pz.11#	Cz.58#	UK regional clothing company
Pz.21#	Cz.59#	Worldwide FTSE telecommunications company
Pz.07##	Cz.60#	UK very large retailer
Pz.16#	Cz.61#	UK and US very large logistics and supply chain company
Pz.02#	Cz.62#	Online syllabus provider
Pz.18#	Cz.63#	Business management consultants
Pz.07##	(Cz.64#)	UK very large retail department store
Pz.14#	(Cz.65#)	UK very large insurance company
Pz.21#	(Cz.66#)	UK very large higher education institution

Pz.04#	(Cz.67#)	Worldwide very large information technology company
Pz.01#	(Cz.68#)	A Cz.20# developed product based on AI
Pz.01#	(Cz.69#)	British AI company
Pz.16#	(Cz.70#)	UK elite large higher education institution
Pz.34#	(Cz.71#)	A number of diverse entrepreneurial companies
Pz.35#	(Cz.72#)	Popular restaurant chain
Pz.36#	(Cz.73#)	Medical provider

Appendix 7 – Samples of coding in NVivo

Explanation

This appendix contains samples of NVivo coding to enable the reader to see how the coding was done. The samples are as follows:

1. Sample one - An entire transcript of one of the participants (Pz.07#). This has time stamps within it (the first 5 minutes not being transcribed as it was just chatter). The subheadings were preset codes (eg current job application process) based on the research interview prompt sheet provided in Appendix 5. The highlights are the sections coded for “teamwork”. All transcripts were coded at multiple codes, but it is not possible to show all the highlighted codes at the same time.
2. Sample two – An extract of the same transcript showing two different codes highlighted. This is simply to demonstrate multiple codes for the same transcript.
3. Sample three – An exported reference view of a single node, “teamwork”. This shows all the items coded at “teamwork”, across 12 transcripts.
4. Sample four – An exported summary view of a single node, “teamwork”. This shows the number of transcripts and references to this node in summary format.

Sample one

Name: Pz.07# transcription

Transcription of Interview: Pz.07#

00:05:00

Current job application process

RTS#

Can you talk me through the process from when you first saw the job at Cz.43# advertised, or however you found out about the job, up to getting the job offer; just the overall process?

Pz.07#

I think I first...so firstly I love supermarkets so I looked at all the supermarket applications. For most of them you need a driving licence and I had failed my driving test four times so it wasn't a possibility for me. I'm so bad at driving it's just unreal, I just can't do anything practical! So that ruled out quite a few of the supermarkets, all the discounters, Tesco, Morrisons...pretty much everyone except for Cz.43# and Cz.60#.

RTS#

Really? Were you looking for any kind of job or specifically grad schemes?

Pz.07#

Grad schemes. So I applied in January/December, some time like that. So, yeah, they were all graduate schemes. So I think I found out about Cz.43# because I looked for it and then they had an online portal where you submit your application and I remember I spent ages on it, which is why I remember; there was kind of a cover letter almost, I spent ages doing it because I really wanted it and then I found out it was actually an optional requirement and I'd spent ages doing it! And I asked Jack and I was like, did you write this cover letter and he was like, no you didn't have to do it! So that was kind of the first stage and then, you know, fill in all your details...

RTS#

[Actually] I don't know...so this is an application form of some kind online?

Pz.07#

Yeah, like you log in to a portal and then there was the optional application form and then there was also just the details which were obviously compulsory: your name, where you went to university, all your different qualifications...but it was very much interested in you, it was kind of just pure details whereas some of them don't care about the details, they're more like questions with loads of answers. So, yeah, this was purely just filling out your details and then from that I think...

RTS#

Did you upload your CV as well?

Pz.07#

I don't think so, I think it was an annoying one where you have to, like, pull apart your CV and fill it into their boxes, which is always very annoying to do. So, yeah, you had to do that and then I think they just do a check to basically check that you're meeting their minimum requirements, and then they give you a series of tests to do.

RTS#

And so how does that work? Do they email you or something?

Pz.07#

Yeah, they email you with then and then when you pass one you get the next one

RTS#

Okay, so if you didn't pass one, so if you do the first one and they say you haven't passed this, so you don't go on to the second one. So, there's actually a series of gateways?

Pz.07#

Yes

RTS#

So what were the tests like?

Pz.07#

So the tests were...I believe they were...there was definitely maths (I must have got through it but I didn't think I'd passed that...I failed quite a lot of tests, to be honest). Then there was a verbal reasoning, which is like where they give you a paragraph and then you have to, like, multiple choice answer it. But by this point I'd done quite a few applications so I was okay on it because they kind of repeat the questions, and so that was fine and I think that was it...there might have been one of those shape ones

RTS#

Which ones?

Pz.07#

Like different shapes...

RTS#

Oh 'what's the next shape'?

Pz.07#

Yeah, sequencing ones. I think there was [sic] about three

RTS#

Okay. Then what happened?

Pz.07#

And then when you've passed them you go through to a telephone interview

RTS#

So they send you an email saying you're going to get a phone call now?

Pz.07#

Yeah, they must have sent me an email but it was with...because I remember thinking there must be loads of people on the phone doing these things and actually it just turned out to be the one guy who was in charge of the whole graduate scheme who had to call up all of the graduates to do it!

00:10:00

RTS#

So there was a phone call with one person

Pz.07#

Phone call with one person and they pretty much based it on...I learned this that they all do, base it on their values so it was kind of a question per value

RTS#

So what's an example of a value?

Pz.07#

'We believe in being kind of transparent with our customers. When's a time when you showed great customer service?'

RTS#

Okay, so a sort of mix of values and competency-type questions?

Pz.07#

Yes. They'd always like swing it towards their values so you kind of knew what was coming and as long as you kind of paid attention to the values then they liked the answer, and then you just gave the STAR answer, you know, classic. By that point you're just so used to...

RTS#

Okay, keep going – what happened next?

Pz.07#

So then you did that and then you got invited to an assessment centre if you passed it and the assessment centre was really good because 1) it was in Holborn so I was like, this is great because it's up the road, and because you're doing your final year at the same time you can't really bother to take a day out to do these things, and it was only

half a day which was really good and definitely what all graduate schemes should do because you don't need a full day to be sitting around. So it's half a day and I think it had like four parts to it, so it had an interview, then it had a group assessment which was based around, like, you're lost on a desert island, these are your items, how do you prioritise the items, and then there's a panel who are watching you do it, so it's always a bit nice and awkward. And then there was a presentation which you prepared for – I think it was about a fifty minute presentation – and half of it was, like, how do you improve life for colleagues and the other side how to improve it for customers and you had to come with your ideas of how Cz.43# could change that and then you presented to one person. I quite liked that because some graduate schemes make you write the presentation there and then whereas this was actually thought out – they're looking at ideas as well as how you present. And then I think those were...I think that was it, to be honest, yeah.

RTS#

So then what happened?

Pz.07#

So then after that day they call you up and tell you if you got through it or not and I think they literally did it on the day, it was very quick. This was very efficient, this graduate scheme; some of them were not so much. So then, so they call you up on the day and then you have to come in for a director interview and they tell you who your director will be and mine was Angie Risley, who is the director of HR, who is really nice so it was great.

00:13:05

RTS#

So that was a one-to-one interview?

Pz.07#

Yep, a one-to-one interview...well a one-to-two interview...it was really one-to-one but the person who led the graduate scheme was in on the interview as well. And then I was literally walking out of the door and coming back here to do some work and they called me and they were like, 'they've never seen anyone like you, you're through!' They were like, 'you're too qualified for the graduate scheme', they were like, 'no-one comes in with that amount of experience that you are way above and we need to make sure that we push you in the graduate scheme so you don't get left behind'. It was quite a surprise though as I hadn't really done that much but, obviously, people just don't do anything...

RTS#

Isn't that fantastic? So, the director, when you say that do you mean the person who became your line manager?

Pz.07#

No, the director

RTS#

So director of your department, right, so you've got a line manager underneath that somewhere? Or you're not in that department?

Pz.07#

No, it could have been anyone

RTS#

So it had to be director level?

Pz.07#

Yes, some people had the director of Finance, it just had to be with a director, it just so happened I got HR, which was good

RTS#

Okay, so what sort of questions can you recall that they asked in that interview?

Pz.07#

It wasn't...I remember thinking, I remember preparing for it and thinking it was going to be another one of those STAR questions but obviously directors don't really care. I remember it just being a chat, literally a chat, it was just me steering it more because I think I was just really interested in it, I was like how do Cz.43# do HR and asking her about her career and a lot of stuff...it was about...we were taking time out to do, we're thinking of doing painting sessions to help people with mindfulness and mental health so I was, like, how does mental health work in Cz.43#, and it just so happened they were having an initiative at the time to improve the whole healthy wellbeing thing. So we literally just chatted about that for ages.

00:15:15

RTS#

So you interviewed her, is what you're saying?

Pz.07#

Well, I thought, we've got an hour, she's an interesting person, you don't usually get to have a one-on-one like that so...

RTS#

Okay, so that was for an hour. And with the presentation, did you say fifty or fifteen minutes?

Pz.07#

Fifteen

RTS#

And did you prepare that before the day?

Pz.07#

Well, you're supposed to...but, yeah

RTS#

Okay, so they sent you some details in advance?

Pz.07#

Probably a week in advance

RTS#

So that was about improving some aspect of experience for customers and for staff, right. And from your facial expression, you didn't prepare, is that right?

Pz.07#

[laughs] I did prepare a bit, but then...so like very close to that my friend committed suicide...so I didn't really prepare all that well. I remember being up at five in the

morning the day before, like oh dear, I really should memorise a list, then on the train I was like, okay, okay, and then just went and did it

RTS#

Okay. The group exercise, how many people were in the group?

Pz.07#

About six of us

RTS#

So, we were just in one room and then there was the panel in the same room watching you? How many people were on the panel?

Pz.07#

I remember it being at least the same amount so probably about six or seven people

RTS#

So, what did you think about that experience?

Pz.07#

That was actually fine because, I don't know, we'd done quite a lot of stuff out here...it was also quite a fun task so I was just quite interested in it. My group were really nice, which made a difference because sometimes you go to these things and you've got one very outspoken person and it means that you can't really get on with it whereas this group could work together really easily, so yeah, it was fine, that was the easiest part.

RTS#

And then the first bit, the interview, that wasn't with the director, so who was that with?

Pz.07#

I can't remember who it was with, it was just with another colleague of some level.

RTS#

Was that like a short interview then?

Pz.07#

I think it was probably about half an hour, I reckon

RTS#

So, what did you think that they were looking for on this assessment day overall? You've got your half hour interview, group exercise, presentation...what do you think that they were looking for?

Pz.07#

I think they were looking for a genuine interest in Cz.43#, like in the company you're working for. I think they made it very easy for me as I literally love this so it's very easy. I think they were also looking for kind of understanding what you're supposed to do when you come out of it, so what actually is the job that you're applying for and having interests in different areas of the business and understanding how it works. I think they're generally just looking for someone who is either sensible and grown-up enough to do the role.

RTS#

And so did you try and show that or was it just all instinct for you? Were you sort of aware that that was what they were looking for?

Pz.07#

No, I think just if you were yourself then it tends to work. I do think it's because we practise it so much here that it kind of becomes instinct anyway, so you do present every day, you do group exercises every day, you're just so used to it that you don't need to think about it, whereas I can imagine if you're just say in a classroom and never get those opportunities it would actually be very nerve wracking. It was literally like go into one of the companies and like how we'd appear all the time, so yeah, it was fine

RTS#

And what about the online stuff that you had to do, the gateways that you had to get through? The application form sounds like it was just details but you got the cover letter and then you've got the tests. What do you think they were looking for in all of that?

Pz.07#

I never really understood why companies did that. We had a talk here once about it and made me think very differently about them...I can't remember who came in...someone who runs all these tests that they do for companies and they said that it's basically lots of people go to private school and lots of people pay for education and lots of people have very good opportunities given to them, whereas you need to have that natural ability and with the shape tests and things like that it comes from...you can't learn that kind of thing, it's about how your brain works, so it's kind of a way of sifting out who's had a good education for the sake of a good education and who actually is genuinely smart and it kind of weans out the people in between. So that's the way I think of it and I think that's quite nice because if you're clever but you haven't had the best education but still you are genuinely smart you can get through those levels. It's also just a way of sifting out the masses and getting it down to a number which is sensible enough to look through.

00:20:30

RTS#

Do you think they use the details in your degree or where it came from or anything like that as part of the sifting?

Pz.07#

No

RTS#

So you think the sifting was done just on the online test results to start off with?

Pz.07#

So, they look at your predicted grade so that's another element of sifting. I've never had an experience of – the ones that I've done – where people are actually interested in where you go to university which is why I always think there's no point going to a Russell Group university because no-one's interested

RTS#

That's very interesting. Have you had any discussion about your grades at university or what you studied at university in any of your applications?

Pz.07#

You talk about it but no-one really asks you about but, obviously, this [having studied at Cz.35#?] is like a really good selling point so it kind of shows that you're very different and you've gone against the curve and you've chosen this for a reason and there are so many more things to talk about, so I brought it into loads of my answers but I don't think they directly ask you, and that's a shame because you get a different array of people doing geography, art, history, finance...just all different things, so I think it's more about how you can sell what you've done and prove that you've done it for a reason

RTS#

That's fascinating. Overall, taking that Cz.43# experience as a whole, what are your feelings and thoughts about that as a recruitment and selection process?

Pz.07#

I thought that was really good. There is also another part of it which I forgot. It's another test but it was like a test to kind of find out your personality type, which I thought was an actual test so I answered all of them [laughs] 'kind of like this, kind of like that...' not honest and then I went into it and they like presented you with your results and it costs quite a lot of money for companies to do it, apparently, and they were, like, we're giving you the results for free. And they were like 'we've never seen a test like this, you haven't marked...you haven't shown highly or anything or low on anything, everything's in the middle, do you want to talk me through your results and how it relates to you?' So, yes, that wasn't really a test, it was actually a genuine interest that they wanted to know what kind of personality type you are but I definitely read that one wrong

RTS#

Was that like Myers Briggs?

Pz.07#

Yes, something like that

RTS#

So why did you decide to answer in that way?

Pz.07#

I literally thought they were looking for...I thought it was a bit of a trick and they were looking for your weaknesses, of which I decided not to say any

RTS#

That's very interesting. The theoretical framework I'm using for this is signalling theory, so about the employers are sending but I'm more interested in the signals you guys are sending or feel that you should send, so that's very interesting because you're trying to figure out what is it that they're after.

Pz.07#

Yes, otherwise I'd have answered it all honestly and been able to answer that interview question much better!

RTS#

So that was done when you did the online tests. Overall you think it was a good process. You mentioned it was quite short and efficient so you liked that. What about in terms of assessing you as a potential employee, do you think it was a suitable process for that?

Pz.07#

I definitely think it was and I definitely think – and this is something that Cz.43# always say – that they've hired fifteen people who are pretty much carbon copies of each other, we are literally all the same.

RTS#

Really? But they said they'd never seen anyone like you?

Pz.07#

Yeah, but when you come into work you get people who are polite, who are competent, who have come from quite a similar background and, I don't know, you just don't see anyone with any sort of difference

RTS#

Fascinating. So are you one of the fifteen? Or do you think that you're different?

Pz.07#

Of course I'm different! [laughs] I think in some ways I'm similar to them, in other ways I feel like I have more confidence to do things that they won't do, I don't know, like they're a bit cautious and like speaking to their managers and things like that, just do this and do that. Definitely I'm more like ballsy but in terms of quite well spoken and that kind of thing I think actually we are all quite similar. I do think they maybe haven't given people a chance who are a bit different, like there's nobody with accents, there's nobody who is like from a different ethnicity, nobody with disabilities, that's something that's not very diverse. Everyone's got a degree, obviously as it's a graduate scheme but nobody had done anything other than kind of going to a standard university and doing a course which they thought was useful which then they haven't used. So in that's way it's like you're all the same

00:25:55

RTS#

So if you were running this what would you want to do differently?

Pz.07#

I think about bit more like life experience, what have you actually done that makes you different rather than how do you sound when you answer interview questions because everyone can prep for that. I think more like the actual doing is important.

RTS#

So are you enjoying the job?

Pz.07#

Yeah I love it, it's so good.

RTS#

I've got to ask, why do you love supermarkets?

Pz.07#

I just think they're so interesting. I just think it's amazing that you go anywhere else in the world, maybe except for America, and supermarkets are so rubbish, you can't like get any food...you go to Spain and it's all like one type of cuisine and it's very easy to get...and like it's shopped in a different way whereas here you like source things from all over the world, you want anything and you can get it literally down the road, like supply chains are insane. It just like feels the economy quicker than anything else. If something happens, I don't know anything happens...

RTS#

There's a big issue with bananas

Pz.07#

Yes, you just feel it straight away but how generally people are so, have people got money at the moment, no, are people buying houses, no, but like that affects the supermarkets. Okay, so people aren't buying houses at the moment so they're also not buying the expensive side of the supermarket which means you have to completely change your strategy; it just changes.

RTS#

It's like a barometer

Pz.07#

Yes, it's amazing. It's very easy to see, okay [it's the] World Cup so we've got to buy more booze or, I don't know...but even like people are going away on holiday – are people going away on holiday much this year, not really so therefore our summer sales are better, so it's like just everything that happens has an effect on supermarkets and like you do need to change so quickly, it's not like you can sit still for a second, like you've got Tesco on your back, you've got Asda doing this...there's so much competition and then also like the biggest sellers competition, now it's opened up globally, it's just amazing

RTS#

That is fascinating. So does that mean that everything you applied for was a supermarket?

Pz.07#

No, I applied for all different things

Job application A

RTS#

Okay, so if I could choose another one. If you could think of one that maybe stands out in your memory, maybe one where you had to do a few things of some kind, going through

Pz.07#

Shall I do the other one that I got offered a job for?

RTS#

Yeah

Pz.07#

That was Cz.17#, the train company. I just really like operational things, a bit of a theme. So this was Cz.17# and the thing that attracted me to this one was it offered a Masters free and you could pick whichever Masters you wanted to do, they're weren't fussy on university or what you wanted to do there as long as it was relevant they would pay for it. And that was the only one I found who offered that. They're quite old school, so that's probably why they did it but I just thought it was really good and at least they're fostering education. How did I find out about Cz.17#, I don't know, probably searched graduate schemes, searched on Google...don't know really.

RTS#

Okay, so you found it somehow

Pz.07#

So then you had to do application questions. What were the questions? Why do you want to be on the scheme...can't really remember. Some form of filtering questions. And then after that you went through to the tests again and similar tests to Cz.43#. I don't think you had to do maths though, I think it was just verbal reasoning and abstract reasoning or something.

00:30:08

RTS#

This is the shapes one? I know the type of thing you mean

Pz.07#

And then...no personality test for this one. And then you had to do a video interview...

RTS#

Ah, so tell me about this

Pz.07#

...which was awful. So you get two types of video interviews: you get one where you can prepare for, you know the questions they're going to ask you, and then you get this one which is they can literally ask you anything so it's like a little guy on the screen and he's like hello, it's like an actual video of somebody pre-recorded and then you get like ten seconds you have to answer. So they can be quite...if you can't think of answer there's no way you're going to have time to think of it again. Sometimes you get to re-record it but only once, if you've really messed up. So they just ask you kind of normal questions. They ask you one like, what do you think is like the biggest thing affecting Cz.17# right now, or something and then like, what's your best quality, what's your weakness, standard type questions

RTS#

So this is one of the ones where you couldn't prepare, you didn't know the questions ahead? So how long did that video interview take?

Pz.07#

Half an hour or so

RTS#

And what do you think they're looking for in that?

Pz.07#

Ability to think on your feet. They're also seeing how you come across and whether you're giving answers that are actually relevant to what you're saying, whether you can take in information and give them something useful. I think it's quite easy to fool people in interviews, like they're probably forgotten what question they've asked you by the time you're answered it whereas in that it's very much like, this is the question, what answer have you given. Yeah, just how like personable you are.

RTS#

What do you think they do with that? Do you think they just sit there and just watch them all?

Pz.07#

I'm guessing that they watch them all and grade them all on a scale of one-to-ten and then add up your score and the highest ones go through. I'm guessing you have to

answer 'wellish' on all of them though, like completely average on all of them, I can't imagine they'd let you like answer badly on some of them and amazing on others and they'd let you through

RTS#

So what happened after that?

Pz.07#

So then we got invited to another assessment day but that one was in Birmingham so we had like final hand-in and then on the day I had to go and travel afterwards to do this

RTS#

So you had to hand your dissertation in and then rush up to Birmingham?

Pz.07#

No, I think it was the January hand-ins and then, yeah, you got the train up and then you stay overnight but they were a really nice company, they're really nice. So they invited quite a lot of their employees to come along and they're the ones who assess you – it's kind of like Cz.43# so not any specific job role, not in HR, as in not like made for the graduate scheme, they are just random employees who do different things in the company. And then we had just kind of standard checking in, checking all your documents like passport, things like that, and then we had...I remember they were like, 'do you want a drink' and everyone's like, 'shall we have a drink?'...and then we went to dinner with all of them and they kind of like split us up and put us on tables with all the employees. That was nice because it settled your nerves and you could talk to them about things before you've even been interviewed at all but I'm thinking, this is probably part of the interview, isn't it, how you actually get on with people. So I thought that was good because it kind of shows they're actually interested in you and it's not so set in stone. I'm really not a fan of interviews which are very black and white and they write down your answers and judge you on that; they should judge you on how you are as a person. So that was good, I was sitting next to a really interesting guy who was doing the optimisation of train tickets, like when they go up in price and when they come down in price and they build that, how they sell tickets to other companies. He was saying about how there was like a scandal of people when they went on Apple Macs they get more expensive tickets and then when on Dells they get less expensive tickets and how that's been taken away now because obviously...

00:35:00

Pz.07#

So that was good and then we went to bed and then I remember thinking, oh dear, I haven't prepped for this one again [laughs] but by this point you're so like second hand [sic] at doing these things...so again just looked over their values, I remember I watched some TED videos – they always inspire me, you can steal different phrases from them and sound clever tomorrow

RTS#

So nothing to do with them, just some TED videos on leadership or something?

Pz.07#

Yeah. I always read their [the company's] annual report because that gives you like a piece of 'gold' that's great and I used to want to be the person who wrote the annual

reports so I'm interested in them. So yeah, I always think it's like good to...within the same sort of area so I don't know whether it might be like innovation, operations or like women in business or something random, don't just... get your mind into thinking a bit outside the box, something a bit different. You can make connections later but as long as you're not thinking too how much you're a leader or what's your best quality...[unclear] think bigger. So, yeah, that was good. And then we went to do the interviews the next day and it was really unfair actually because they had two different graduate schemes and I was applying for the marketing one and they also had the engineers on the same selection day doing the same tasks. I just thought, it's so unfair, the engineers clearly are applying for a very different role and they are basically being forced to do marketing tasks. So we did a group exercise and it was on genuinely marketing – it was so unfair – it was on 'how do you get people to travel the UK more and how do you like to support...' oh no no, forget the travelling the UK bit, it was name a marketing campaign to support prostate cancer, which was there charity of choice, so people came up with some like naff ideas, like we should get buckets and stand in the street and that's naff... [short discussion about whether this sort of collection is still allowed].

So they came up with all these ideas and the poor engineers probably didn't even know what on earth this was; they're used to like numbers and putting things together. So then I came up with the idea of [unclear] aren't right, I'm going to lead this one because it's not going anywhere, so I stood up, got the piece of...whiteboard, put it in the middle of the room and I was like, right, let's think about it differently and there was right, so prostate cancer...people obviously don't like look for prostate cancer and that's the problem, it's very like, oh we shouldn't talk about it, and everyone felt we should talk about it, it's cancer, and I was like we've got to talk about it, that's the whole point that we need to put it out there, so I was like, hey, people that don't like...basing it on [encouraging] people to go for more examinations and there's also places in the UK where people never visit as well so I was okay why don't we find these hidden places and then link it in with like finding prostate cancer and how people don't go here and they also don't like to search for prostate cancer. So we came up with all these different slogans about how you should search for things and how you should travel the UK and then we put on like 5p from every ticket that's sold outside of these regions now goes to prostate cancer if you do that. Yes, so we did that, that was really good, I was like this is the best start I could get, it's so good. Obviously the marketing people were like [cheers] and the engineers were just [sad sound], it was really bad. So that was good and I remember that being a very energetic task, it was good. I was probably the annoying person who takes over but, oh well. And then we had to do...

RTS#

So did you have to present back?

Pz.07#

Yes, you have to be with the group the whole time and then you have to present back afterwards.

RTS#

To the same group that was watching you?

Pz.07#

Yes

RTS#

So that's weird: so you've kind of figured it all out, they're watching you and then you turn around and [give the presentation]?

Pz.07#

Yeah, so it's not about the presentation in the end, it's more about how you actually get to that. I remember thinking, oh god, the point is I'll talk as much...I'll really encourage them to talk...okay are you happy with that and it was in the feedback after, 'you're very inclusive, you're very good', so I was like oh okay, that's good.

RTS#

Why did you do that?

Pz.07#

Because I felt really bad for them and I thought they probably aren't the most confident people to speak up and you don't want to appear very overpowering so you need to include other people's ideas, it isn't just us. So I was, maybe you should speak up a bit and I guess you kind of know there are people who are going to include other people and kind of get the point of this is a group exercise and not just you taking the reins

RTS#

I was going to say, you're competing with the engineers but I guess what you just said explains it then

Pz.07#

You want to be confident in yourself, knowing you are giving good ideas also [unclear] you include everyone

RTS#

Good. Keep going

Pz.07#

So we did that one and then we had an interview and I was so happy because it wasn't a...I can't remember what they called it but it wasn't a competency interview, it was kind of like really random questions that didn't really follow any sort of structure. It was like what would you do if this happened, how would you deal with this sort of situation, and they were like you can use examples of things you've done but if you haven't done anything relevant just tell us how you would react to it. So in a roundabout sort of way it was competency but it was much more open discussion and it wasn't me giving my answers, it was me saying a bit and then them questioning on it and then it was just in a way more flowing which was nice. Yes, so that was pretty good and again that was energetic and good and because you have the day before you know the people as well, so that was good

RTS#

So was that two people interviewing then?

Pz.07#

Yes

RTS#

And roughly how long was the interview?

Pz.07#

It was quite a long interview, I think it was about an hour/hour and a half

RTS#

So how long was the group exercise and presentation?

Pz.07#

It was probably about similar. They were long...the whole day was quite long

RTS#

So were there any other exercises?

Pz.07#

I don't think so, I think that was it

RTS#

So they took you up there...

Pz.07#

Oh no, there was, there was some sort of written essay thing, I can't remember what it was on at all

RTS#

So that was on that day, so there were three broad activities then over the course of that day?

Pz.07#

Yes and then there was not an interview but asking the 'old' graduates what the graduate scheme was like so like a meet and greet sort of thing

RTS#

So did they pay for the hotel and dinner and all that and did they pay for your travel up there as well?

Pz.07#

Yes

RTS#

So then what happened after that?

Pz.07#

So then the next day they called me and I'd got a place

00:43:08

RTS#

So that's very fast, the next day. When did you decide to not take it and why?

Pz.07#

So I got that one first and I thought I'd take it and then I got the Cz.43# one afterwards

RTS#

So like a similar time period or something?

Pz.07#

No, I think it was a month and a half later, something like that

RTS#

So had you already accepted this one?

Pz.07#

I'd accepted verbally

RTS#

But then because you love supermarkets...

Pz.07#

I was a lot more interested in the Cz.43# one...they were both really good but I think it was more the fact that 1) it was a supermarket and 2) it was in London and I didn't have to move out whereas this one was every placement you'd have to move and I'd likely be in Swindon or Reading...

RTS#

So what do you think was the key thing on you actually getting this job?

Pz.07#

I think it was like just being less 'graduatey', less kind of polished but not...but you're all real at the same time, because it's so relaxed in them I just felt like we were always having chats and I didn't have nerves about, oh my gosh we're at an interview; it was just very much like, okay this is natural, this is fine

RTS#

So you felt relaxed and you felt that helped

Pz.07#

Yeah, because I think they're used to dealing with people who are like just come out of university and so nervous and you can really sense that when you're kind of sitting in the room with these people, they're so nervous that you can only imagine that's going to come across in the interview whereas I was sort of, well you know... I think I was very confident in my answers because they were very real, I wasn't making anything up and everything I did I was very interested in. I'd done like the Co.65# internship which wasn't so great but you could use it to talk about how you turned around an experience, talked about [unclear] which obviously was just really fun and exciting and then loads of different stuff at the university, CZ.34#, had kind of new business anyway, like that's all they're looking for a real understanding of current affairs, of what's going on. And I think just because you know all of that you're almost relaxing and want them to ask you stuff because these are fun conversations to have

RTS#

And what did you think about that as a recruitment and selection experience?

Pz.07#

I really loved it and I felt super guilty when I said no to them because they were really nice people, they had put in so much effort and that was their only assessment day, so it was one assessment day whereas Cz.43# were doing them weekly. I just thought it was really good. I thought, okay, I might work for them in the future.

RTS#

But you did think it was unfair on the engineers and with the Cz.43# one you thought it perhaps wasn't fair when you looked at the results for whatever reason, so were there any other criticisms, if you like, you would have of that?

Pz.07#

I think they were much more inclusive. I think Birmingham was a bit of a trek but that's a personal thing. It was again a whole day long whereas it probably could have been a lot quicker and leaner. I think they did it differently, I think that was a good thing so I think both of those are really good because I agreed with their process for doing it, I was much more...I wanted it much more.

RTS#

So the actual process itself affects your willingness to work with a company

Pz.07#

Yes, it shows how smart a company is and how seriously they take it and if it's very much bog standard you think you've been doing this for years, haven't you, you haven't thought about it.

Job application B

RTS#

So maybe for the third one you could choose one you remember where perhaps you didn't particularly like the process

Pz.07#

So loads of them I got rejected at test stage. I went to a Cz.60# interview⁴ and didn't really like that one, that was really horrible.

RTS#

Shall we talk about that one then?

Pz.07#

Yeah. So this was my first assessment centre and I think that really showed. I didn't really know what one was until I went to it so I think after that it helped everything that came afterwards. So what did Cz.60# do? They did a lot of...I think they did about seven questions, which was like the main application. They were quite different, to do with supermarkets and, I don't know, name something interesting that's happened to Cz.60# in the news or what's the best...it was very much Cz.60# supermarket based. So that was good, I liked the questions.

RTS#

So that was online?

Pz.07#

Yes, because I remember I'd based – this was one of the first things I did – and I based all my other answers on those questions because it pretty much related to everything I did later on, on other applications. So I did those and then, I don't there was [sic] any questions for Cz.60#, I don't think there was.

RTS#

So what happened?

Pz.07#

I can't remember how many in between, there might have been another stage in the middle of it...and then I remember the interview well, the assessment centre. Somehow I got through to the assessment centre and I...yes, so the assessment centre was the first one I did and this was what gave me a bad impression of assessment centres. It was long, it was so long, and it was like very much you had to have worked in a supermarket to understand what they were asking you. So first of all they made us hang around for ages with these 'old' graduates who were really annoying. I remember one was like...they loved supermarkets more than me, that's annoying! One was 'If you cut me open I'd bleed green'! So they were very much like, very Cz.60#. So we went to that and I remember just hanging around for ages in the morning, thinking this is using up my energy when we could be doing something else

00:50:16

RTS#

You hadn't done anything yet?

Pz.07#

Hadn't done anything, we were just chatting amongst ourselves, chatting to the 'old' graduates, chatting to...just chatting forever. I was thinking I bet they're going to go back and report what we're saying so...

RTS#

Did you think that at the time?

Pz.07#

Yeah. I thought, this is an odd thing to do and they're not relaxing us at all because they're just telling us things which we don't want to hear and not telling us anything about the assessment centre and obviously that's what we want to know. So what did we have to do for that one? We had to do a presentation but we didn't prepare for it, we had to go into the room and sit at separate tables – it was like an exam – and they gave you (no joke) about twenty sheets full of information of different things about their values and then different scenarios – oh no, I'm mixing it up, sorry – so we did have to do this but this was for the role play. So we had to do a role play, we go into a room and they gave you twenty different sheets, different values and then different scenarios about a person but it was so much information to take in and not long enough to take it in. You could write things down but what is like the next stage of it? You don't know what it's for

RTS#

So they sat you down on separate tables, hand you this wad of paper...did they tell you anything about what you had to do? It was just 'read this'?

Pz.07#

Read this. So you're trying to read it and understand it and try to just make some sense of it and then they take you into the room for the role play and – it's quite funny – one of their employees just kind of slump in a chair, like they must be like thirty or forty, but they're acting like a teenager so you walk in and there's this moody teenager and you basically needed to have memorised all their values and understand exactly what they want from there like a disciplinary process, so it's all in this information, disciplinary process, values, case study on this person, you need to take it all in. So you go into this room and they tell you [that] you need to discipline this colleague, they have been off work three times something and you need to... So probably my fault, maybe it said it in the information and I didn't read it right, so I went in and I was so harsh on them, like why are you off? And then I remember being, right well, you know I've warned you before so you're fired. You add comments to the stuff, I think I said one more chance and then you're fired – I think I probably used words definitely you should never say, and you had to find out that his mum was an alcoholic so that's why he was being resistant to going on the training courses because it disrupts things for the family and he had exams and all this stuff and basically you had to work out his emotional problems and why he's behaving the way he is. And then go in line with the disciplinary process for what you do next. So I just messed it up!

RTS#

So was it just one at a time that you went in?

Pz.07#

Yes, one at a time, us, the role player and somebody marking us

RTS#

So I thought you said there were thirty people there?

Pz.07#

Yeah, there was [sic] but you go into this room separately to do a disciplinary role play

RTS#

So a disciplinary role play with this pretend slouchy teenager and then someone who was observing you. So with that, did you feel that you'd not done well at that at the time?

Pz.07#

No, I didn't feel I did badly until I got the feedback on it and I was like, oh, I didn't do that well! I thought, oh actually that's gone quite well, I found out all the stuff about him, but then in my feedback they were 'you were way too harsh, we would never do that to anyone' and they were in John Lewis we always think about people. That's kind of what they wanted to see, they were looking for whether you are following the disciplinary process or whether you are caring more about the person. So it was a little bit like, there were loads of people there who worked in Cz.60# and they were like, well that's a disciplinary process, you've done it wrong, this is what you should do when people discipline you and obviously they had first-hand experience of it so they brought that to the interviews, which obviously helped them when they interviewed. So, yeah, that didn't go great.

RTS#

So was the role play the first thing you did after the endless chatting?

00:55:00

Pz.07#

Yeah, I think we got split into different groups and then you rotated so it was just chance what you did first

RTS#

So did they give you feedback then or was that not until later in the day?

Pz.07#

Later after

RTS#

So you did that, you fired someone, feeling pretty good. What happened next?

Pz.07#

Then I did a presentation which, again, you couldn't prep for but it was something fairly easy like, I can't remember what it was but I think you had to make about five points or something, I vaguely remember, that was pretty standard and easy compared to some of the other presentations.

RTS#

So were you given some information to base it on?

Pz.07#

Yes.

RTS#

And was that presentation again with the small group or was it more people watching you this time?

Pz.07#

No that was a one-on-one presentation again. And then we had to do a group task and...what was it about...oh it was about people being made redundant and one of the stores was going to close and you had to basically build a process to make the people redundant, say what your priorities are and how you are actually going to deliver the message, what would happen if somebody disputed it, deal with that process. We did that in a group of people and that was just awful, it just didn't click. We didn't get long and it almost like a big argumentative. In the Cz.43# one you actually worked as a group and you could really feel it whereas this was, you say something and then somebody would be like, 'good answer but I actually think...' and it was a bunch of the same sort of people and it was quite interesting because quite a few of them were from Teach First [where you] get fast-tracked on to the graduate schemes from that so you don't have to do any of the first stages, you get fast - tracked to assessment centres and on my Cz.60# one there happened to be a few of them. And they were very different, they were very 'teachery' and so I think it almost didn't work that well. So, yeah, that was that and then I remember I got feedback on that and they were like, 'you good and that was fine', and they were actually 'we preferred the position that you played in it, like you didn't take charge of it, which was a good thing' and they were, 'we actually look for people who don't lead the way, we look for people who sit back and give good information and also try and include everyone', which I think is probably how I knew how quickly everyone on later schemes, so I think that was good. So that was fine because I'd thought I'd messed that one up, I didn't say enough on that one but actually I didn't get bad feedback on it so it's fine. So I basically read the whole assessment centre wrong. I think I did well on the things I didn't and thought the other way round on the other ones. And then we had an interview which was really boring and just like a completely bog standard competency interview.

RTS#

So is that things like, when have you displayed...

Pz.07#

...leadership, when have had to deal with a difficult...

RTS#

Okay, so you've had those a lot at different interviews, it sounds like?

Pz.07#

Yeah and like a lot of the video interviews and things like start being the same, like the telephone interviews start being the same. It's just bad because you just end up like blah blah blah and you know it off by heart

RTS#

Did you get feedback on your presentation as well?

Pz.07#

Yes, it was really good feedback actually, so after – not good feedback on me but in terms of how much they give – so I did that I was doing my dissertation on supermarkets anyway so I was, I know I didn't get through but can I speak to

somebody in Cz.60# about that interview and presentation; it never actually came to fruition because they couldn't work out who was the right person for me to talk to but anyway, they did try and help, they genuinely tried, and then I got...I remember it being like, it must have been half an hour's worth of feedback

RTS#

On your assessment day?

Pz.07#

Not on the day, so like afterwards they told you that you didn't go through, they were like optional feedback, be in Caffé Nero round here, and they phoned me and then they went through everything in such detail. They told me exactly what to basically do next time, what went wrong, how things came across, so comprehensive that it was just really useful for the other ones because I was, I know what they're looking like, I know what went wrong, completely they like gave me the answers on what to do. Yeah, it was really, really good.

RTS#

So they actually met you at a coffee shop?

Pz.07#

No they called me

RTS#

They called you and you had a chat over the phone – this isn't that day, this is afterwards?

01:00:02

Pz.07#

Afterwards, a week afterwards or something.

RTS#

So they must have been taking all the notes

Pz.07#

Yes, loads of notes, everything they said was full-on, in-depth

RTS#

That's amazing. So what did you think about that overall as a process?

Pz.07#

I remember [unclear] I'd got an interview so I didn't get through, to be honest rather than it being a bad process [laughs] but I didn't feel it worked as well for me as it was very rigid and it was very black and white, you could see them grading you rather than...I don't like interviews where you can see them ticking different boxes and things, so I think it was just too rigid and it didn't allow for any sort of conversation that was away from their answers, which I think is what made me get through the other ones; I actually had an interest in the work whereas this was tick, tick, tick, mark, mark, mark, done.

RTS#

So did you think it was a fair process? You mentioned the other people from Teach First and other people from Cz.60#.

Pz.07#

I think it's probably as fair as they could make it. I think you had an advantage if you worked at Cz.60# and you definitely did because some of the people who worked at

Cz.60# who were 'oh, I'm a manager, got through on the graduate scheme, they helped me prepare for this; and they can name drop quite a bit so, yeah, I think that was the only advantage. And again I think they're from similar kind of middle class, a bit like how Cz.43# do as well, it's just so standard. If you had an pizzazz about you they'd weed you out in the first stage

RTS#

So the key thing I'm getting you're missing out on this job, do you think it was firing the person?

Pz.07#

Yeah. I think it was my lack of being able to take enough information to understand what they wanted from that task, that I just completely did it my way and they probably [thought], what is this girl doing, why has she done this? I just don't think I got the task.

Overall approach to job-hunting

RTS#

That then leads me on to the next set of questions. So we've talked about three specific examples of the process. You said you applied for about twenty jobs so you've obviously gone through the processes with quite a lot of them. Can you tell me about your overall approach to job-hunting?

Pz.07#

Very ad hoc. This is just me in general though, my brain is not very structured, it's all over the place and then it just comes together, so that's kind of how I approach life. So yeah, everyone else had these spreadsheets, go round people's houses, have things on the wall and tick them all off and I was like, really? Whatever. I literally forgot what I was applying for half the time, shall I apply for this one now? But I know my brain doesn't work like that so there's no point trying to make it fit something it's not going to do. So I literally would just...I basically used it as procrastination for studying so I was, you know, do all my assignments then when I get bored of doing my assignments and just want to appear to be productive, I'll apply for something.

RTS#

Appear to who?

Pz.07#

Appear to myself! [laughs] Try to keep myself satisfied, I'd spend most of the day doing work and then do a little cheeky application and then feel like, okay, even if I messed up all my coursework then at least I've applied for a job today!

RTS#

So this was while you were still studying

Pz.07#

Yeah, I work better when I've got loads of things going on at the same time and can't work on something too long [repeats this in other words]

RTS#

So did you only apply to graduate schemes?

Pz.07#

Yes

RTS#

So you searched online to get all sorts of different graduate schemes. And then once you've got something, I guess you have to go through the online process but once they've made some contact with you so you knew you were through, was there any special preparation that you did before going to an assessment day, for example?

Pz.07#

Again, I think it's helpful if you look at things that are outside of what they're asking to do so loads of TED talks, loads of podcasts, get your brain out of the academic way of thinking

RTS#

And why is that?

Pz.07#

It's just because...I don't know...it just helps you to think in a different way and if they're asking you a question you can bring in something random which you've seen here and connect it and, I don't know, it kind of makes you stand out a little bit more rather than just giving examples about your own life – everyone's doing that – so just something interesting. 'Ah yeah, you know, I did this, this and this, and I watched this TED talk the other day on this' and that shows that you...it just gives something different

RTS#

So it makes you more memorable?

Pz.07#

Yeah and obviously it makes it more interesting when you answer the questions

01:05:57

RTS#

Okay, so partly for your own interest! So you can have a more interesting conversation, that's fair enough

Pz.07#

I also write all my interview questions down, put answers in...

RTS#

That's not obvious to me – so you write down what you think they're going to ask you? This is at home beforehand?

Pz.07#

Yeah. So you just, pretty much like – I always do things in my own way – so from the annual report you can see the kind of things they're interested in as a company and then when you're reading it you're thinking, oh they could ask me about this and they could ask me about this and they like knowing about like, I don't know, how innovation is working in some area and okay they might ask me about that. You've got your bog standard ones and those are pretty much engrained in your memory from the very start because you've done the applications, you've done the telephone interviews, now you need to look for something different.

RTS#

Different from other applicants?

Pz.07#

Yes.

RTS#

So in terms of researching the company, you mentioned that you will always look at the annual reports

Pz.07#

Tells you everything- you don't need to do anything else. Annual report and the news.

RTS#

Okay, so it's straight to the annual report, pick out some themes

Pz.07#

Honestly, when you haven't got much time you've got to find quick ways of doing things

Dress

RTS#

And then going along on the day, do you have any preparation in terms of how you were planning to dress, how you're planning to interact, any techniques that you've developed?

Pz.07#

Obviously, dress smart, you know, not too showy, just dressing comfortable so you can actually do the task and you're not thinking about how tight the skirt is; you need to be able to relax.

Overall approach to job-hunting

Pz.07#

And in terms of how you behave, I just think be yourself and just be very genuine. I'm quite interested in what people do and where they're from anyway and we've been to Pearson College [unclear] places in the UK, just kind of talk to the candidates, not kind of tricking you and finding out what you're like, but it helps to relax you and doing a bit of rapport before you go into the group tasks. Yeah, just try and relax really, try not to think about it and then it ends up being better.

Work experience during study

RTS#

So, while you were studying, you mentioned you did a Co.65# internship. Did you do any other work while you were studying? Were you working part-time?

Pz.07#

In my first year I worked in an orthodontist and then I did Co.65# and then I did CZ.34# for a year.

RTS#

For a year – so you worked with CZ.34# for a year, okay. So the CZ.34# one and the orthodontist were both part-time

Pz.07#

I did CZ.34# for the whole of the summer as like an internship and then carried on.

RTS#

So while you were actually studying during the terms, on average how many hours a week of work do you think you were doing?

Pz.07#

Of paid work? Maybe a day in total.

RTS#

So you did two internships, one with Co.65# and one with CZ.34#.

Role of university

RTS#

So with the experience that you've had in going through quite a lot of experience in applying for graduate schemes, what do you think is the role of university/degree study?

Pz.07#

I a hundred per cent believe that it helped me get the job. Everything we do here is pretty much an assessment centre, not that people are assessing us but everything you do you then have to replicate later on so, like I said before, it's just very natural and normal to take a business case and then pull it apart and solve it, we just do it all the time. So I think it was valuable in terms of what you studied in the classroom because the lectures were really interesting and they show you different parts of the world that are actually happening rather than just the theory behind it, so that's good because it makes you actually excited for business and therefore the world and that helps you to get your head out of the books. Yeah, also all the practise we do and I think, it's weird, the hierarchy here really helped because, you meet Ben or...it's just so like there's no kind of barrier between you

RTS#

You mean the lack of hierarchy?

Pz.07#

The lack of hierarchy, yeah. You can chat to you [RTS], it's just very open and so I think when you go into a situation you don't have that fear of the people who are interviewing you, 'oh my god they're older, they know more than me', you feel like they'll value what you're saying because you've been valued here all the way along. So, yeah, I think it a hundred per cent helped me, it just left like I was still at uni and doing the assessment centres, it was great

RTS#

So is that what you think a business degree should do more generally, so that's your experience here, about when you think of students studying business degrees elsewhere?

Pz.07#

Yeah, definitely, that's what it is. You wouldn't study medicine by looking at the book, would you, so you need to actually do it alongside, so it is important to know the theory but realistically you've forgotten the theory by the time you walk out the door, it's all the other bits which you actually remember and which actually come in useful. So, yeah, definitely.

RTS#

So to what extent do you think it's a business school's responsibility, if you like, to help you get a job?

Pz.07#

I don't think it's the responsibility but I think you should equip people to be able to do it by themselves. You can't spoon feed people all the way to the end, you need to [enable them] to be able to it and you can see the difference in people. Some people don't bother at all, less so here, I think everyone has the confidence to do it here so they're more excited about what's to come and they know what's to come and it's almost like spoilt for choice. So I think it's [the college's] responsibility to open your eyes to it but you don't need to be there telling us all to apply

Ideas on helping students**RTS#**

My last question is, if I said to you, I've got ten students at level 5, so that's in the second year of their degrees, it's your responsibility to make sure these students are as well-equipped as possible to get into decent jobs in their first year after graduation, what would you do with them?

Pz.07#

Definitely get some form of job, job or internship but do it, even if it's a terrible experience it teaches you how to deal with people and it means that when you go and get an actual job you're not kind of mystified by an office environment or how things work, and there's enough difference out there for when you do get a job when you keep switching departments, you need to be able to deal with that level of change. I also think it's almost stop complaining. If something goes wrong, in your studies or in your life, something like that, that you need to find a solution to it and not to get someone else to find the solution for you, that you need to be able to not need to be managed almost. So I think almost things that went wrong were quite good, so when you're working in a group that you don't like the people in, someone's not pulling their weight, that is a really good life lesson and it's so much better than things going perfectly and you getting an amazing grade because it actually teaches you how to behave. So I think, grow up a little bit and take responsibility for your own life. And then in all your assignments, do primary research, go out and talk to people and find out things. You're in the middle of London, there are so many...if you just ask, you find someone at LinkedIn ask them, they'll definitely respond to you, that's pretty much what I did my whole way through and you build up this amazing network of people and it's like a good thing to have an excuse to talk to those kind of people and they're so willing to help you and you don't often get that later on in life because they kind of see you as their equal whereas when...you almost use that 'I don't know anything' to your advantage. It can help so much. So yeah, don't concentrate too much on the academic side, by that point you should be able to do it very easily and concentrate on all the other stuff.

01:15:20

RTS#

That is absolutely fascinating, the 'stop complaining' because I have this theory that the way that we're expected to do things in HE is kind of the opposite of what people need at work [expands on this]... That would not be what you'd want your ten students to experience.

Pz.07#

No because then you'll have...you'll really struggle when it comes to work, at work you're not told what to do at all, you have to know what to do and you have to be uncomfortable and [have] uncertainty and you have to always deal with difficult situations and if something isn't going your way you need to know how to make it go away

RTS#

That's quite provocative but I totally get what you're saying and it's quite clever too to, when you talk about the research, so you'd be having an assignment that you're doing but if you weave some primary research into it, firstly that helps your grades enormously but secondly you can use that to build your network, that's very clever and makes perfect sense.

Pz.07#

I literally do it now at work so now I've just finished a buying placement and I've just enrolled in technology and I was like I do need to keep up those buying contacts, though. So [unclear] the [unclear] manager, who's quite top, and then I was like, explain [unclear] what technology was and how [unclear] the conception of technology is and then she was, that's so interesting and I was, oh and I can come and present to you if you want! So I went okay and now I'm doing presentations to all buyers at the same time, like speak to all the heads of technology to get their information on what they think technology is and then you just expand everything, you know everyone in technology and suddenly you've got a place out there in the world of buying as well, in case you want to go back again.

RTS#

It's exponential, isn't it?

Pz.07#

You just...it works a treat, you just need to put in a bit of effort, help other people, you never know what's going to come of it

RTS#

We do have students quite often who complain about group work. What would you say to that?

Pz.07#

You can't choose your team when you come to work and you need to be able to...I see it as an opportunity to make people get on your side. If someone is very unmotivated, don't see that as a problem, you can change the way they're feeling and that's such an achievement for yourself anyway and if you really need an excuse for why it's going to be beneficial to you, you can then go and use it in your interviews because you've actually turned a situation around. So, yeah, you'll never get a perfect team and it's your responsibility to make every team you work in work for you

RTS#

So you wouldn't suggest that we cut out all group work?

Pz.07#

No! Definitely not and I'd mix up the groups that you know are going to cause trouble.

RTS#

Sometimes people complain about presentations too but the way people get on to the programme is through a variation of an assessment day and that's quite deliberate. It's meant to be done in a relatively gentle way, it's just to kind of start it, but in a way you're right, there are assessment centre episodes throughout the programme.

That has been fantastic, really, really interesting. You said you applied for about twenty graduate schemes – how many did you actually get through to interview?

Pz.07#

About four

RTS#

Wow, so you've got really used to...

Pz.07#

...getting rejected. And that is a fantastic skill to learn. It's so good because you can go through your whole life being good at everything, not good at everything but you haven't really seen the world yet, so you can get really good grades but it's not so reflecting of how life is. I think you get very disheartened at the first few rejections whereas I'm actually, this is quite good like mental learning for how to deal with rejection...and as long as you've got a few going that are kind of going your way, just see it as how can I learn for the next one, and that's why you need to apply for loads because something's going to catch you out along the way, they'll be able to catch you out; there'll only be a few which fit the way that you are so that's why you need to apply for so many. You can't apply for the one you're doing and think that you're going to get it, you only get it if you apply for, like, ten others and then done the practice when you go to do your dream one.

01:20:42

RTS#

So when you say 'catch you out' do you mean the filtering mechanism that they're using?

Pz.07#

This is something which isn't going to go in your favour, they're not good at everything so whether it's like you can't do a maths test or whether it's that actually you've had an interview where they've gone completely off-piste and didn't plan for it, you just don't know what's going to come because they don't prescribe it so much so that's why you need to have so many just in case it goes wrong. With everything in life you should do that anyway.

RTS#

Yeah, that's true. Do you think it's appropriate for employers, when you get to an assessment day, to give you something completely unexpected?

Pz.07#

Not completely unexpected, that's like making your brain freeze. I almost think don't catch them out so much they can't think, but if they're doing it in a way that's actually going to be true to how you actually are, so if it's like a practical task or something like that which you couldn't prepare for, then yeah, why not, if you want to see how the person will genuinely deal with pressure. I was speaking to...I actually got lost the other day in Wales...and I made friends with this girl who was a PA to the CEO of the

Lottery and she said when she went to an assessment centre for her role they finished the whole assessment day and she was just about to get on the tube and they called her and they were...they said a load of information down the phone to her and they were like, okay, did you get all that, write us an email saying back what we just told you

RTS#

Wow! [laughs]

Pz.07#

So she thought it was over and then needed to do this different task and she was like, obviously as a PA you're supposed to be able to do those kind of things, then she got the job so it obviously went well for her. But, yeah, little things like that, like it's fun, like it shows that you're a natural person...

RTS#

And you like to enjoy it as well

Pz.07#

Yeah, exactly. I want to go away thinking, that was quite interesting. Also they're a really good company for thinking a bit differently to how we should do it.

RTS#

Well that's all I have to ask. It's been really, really interesting. Apart from my doctorate, it's also been interesting just thinking about the implications of some of the things that you've said. Is there anything that you want to ask me or anything else that you wanted to say?

Pz.07#

Why are you doing your doctorate?

RTS#

[Expands]

Sample two

Sample coding of an extract of the above transcription showing coding for "teamwork" and "reasons for employer decision". For ease of understanding, in this section of the transcript, the sections coded for "teamwork" are shaded and those for "reasons for employer decision" are shaded and underlined.

Transcription of Interview: Pz.07#

00:15:15

RTS#

So you interviewed her, is what you're saying?

Pz.07#

Well, I thought, we've got an hour, she's an interesting person, you don't usually get to have a one-on-one like that so...

RTS#

Okay, so that was for an hour. And with the presentation, did you say fifty or fifteen minutes?

Pz.07#

Fifteen

RTS#

And did you prepare that before the day?

Pz.07#

Well, you're supposed to...but, yeah

RTS#

Okay, so they sent you some details in advance?

Pz.07#

Probably a week in advance

RTS#

So that was about improving some aspect of experience for customers and for staff, right. And from your facial expression, you didn't prepare, is that right?

Pz.07#

[laughs] I did prepare a bit, but then...so like very close to that my friend committed suicide...so I didn't really prepare all that well. I remember being up at five in the morning the day before, like oh dear, I really should memorise a list, then on the train I was like, okay, okay, and then just went and did it

RTS#

Okay. The group exercise, how many people were in the group?

Pz.07#

About six of us

RTS#

So, we were just in one room and then there was the panel in the same room watching you? How many people were on the panel?

Pz.07#

I remember it being at least the same amount so probably about six or seven people

RTS#

So, what did you think about that experience?

Pz.07#

That was actually fine because, I don't know, we'd done quite a lot of stuff out here...it was also quite a fun task so I was just quite interested in it. My group were really nice, which made a difference because sometimes you go to these things and you've got one very outspoken person and it means that you can't really get on with it whereas this group could work together really easily, so yeah, it was fine, that was the easiest part.

RTS#

And then the first bit, the interview, that wasn't with the director, so who was that with?

Pz.07#

I can't remember who it was with, it was just with another colleague of some level.

RTS#

Was that like a short interview then?

Pz.07#

I think it was probably about half an hour, I reckon

RTS#

So, what did you think that they were looking for on this assessment day overall? You've got your half hour interview, group exercise, presentation...what do you think that they were looking for?

Pz.07#

I think they were looking for a genuine interest in Sainsbury's, like in the company you're working for. I think they made it very easy for me as I literally love this so it's very easy. I think they were also looking for kind of understanding what you're supposed to do when you come out of it, so what actually is the job that you're applying for and having interests in different areas of the business and understanding how it works. I think they're generally just looking for someone who is either sensible and grown-up enough to do the role.

RTS#

And so did you try and show that or was it just all instinct for you? Were you sort of aware that that was what they were looking for?

Pz.07#

No, I think just if you were yourself then it tends to work. I do think it's because we practise it so much here that it kind of becomes instinct anyway, so you do present every day, you do group exercises every day, you're just so used to it that you don't need to think about it, whereas I can imagine if you're just say in a classroom and never get those opportunities it would actually be very nerve wracking. It was literally like go into one of the companies and like how we'd appear all the time, so yeah, it was fine

RTS#

And what about the online stuff that you had to do, the gateways that you had to get through? The application form sounds like it was just details but you got the cover letter and then you've got the tests. What do you think they were looking for in all of that?

Pz.07#

I never really understood why companies did that. We had a talk here once about it and made me think very differently about them...I can't remember who came in...someone who runs all these tests that they do for companies and they said that it's basically lots of people go to private school and lots of people pay for education and lots of people have very good opportunities given to them, whereas you need to have that natural ability and with the shape tests and things like that it comes from...you can't learn that kind of thing, it's about how your brain works, so it's kind of a way of sifting out who's had a good education for the sake of a good education and who actually is genuinely smart and it kind of weans out the people in between. So that's the way I think of it and I think that's quite nice because if you're clever but you haven't had the best education but still you are genuinely smart you can get through those levels. It's also just a way of sifting out the masses and getting it down to a number which is sensible enough to look through.

00:20:30

RTS#

Do you think they use the details in your degree or where it came from or anything like that as part of the sifting?

Pz.07#

No

RTS#

So you think the sifting was done just on the online test results to start off with?

Pz.07#

So, they look at your predicted grade so that's another element of sifting. I've never had an experience of – the ones that I've done – where people are actually interested in where you go to university which is why I always think there's no point going to a Russell Group university because no-one's interested

Sample three

Reference view of “teamwork” node

<Internals\\121 interview transcripts\\ Pz.01# transcription> - § 7 references coded [8.93% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 2.48% Coverage

a group test about what...who would you get off an island in what sequence and you all had to be very collaborative and friendly with each other but stand your ground at the same time and then a group, again logical deduction, reasoning test and I think that was the assessment day

RTS#

As a group, did you say?

Pz.01#

Yeah so there was two groups, there was a group...I would assume the first group test we did was, you know how do we engage with one another, convey our points, you know communicate with concision but at the same time have enough depth behind your argument as to why you think somebody should be moved on this island and probably to a degree how hard are you at putting it across, are you too nasty or are you too nice, and then there was a group logical test where we...we had to figure out the best course for an aircraft to take to make eight package drops, was one thing, and yeah figure out how much fuel you were going to have to do it so what was the best course of action and then at the same time we were asked to figure out in what packages would you send the items in so we ended up with these bits of paper with sort of almost Lego block items, trying to figure out which was they were going to go in and I decided to, right these falling apart so I'm going to Sellotape them all together and at the end of the assessment the woman who...one of the women who was running the assessment said, you stuck all these together, and I thought oh god what have I done now because it was either, this is different or you've just made my life really hard and she didn't, she said you know nobody's ever done that, really interesting point, so I kind of wiped my head, said oh thank goodness for that

RTS#

Original

Pz.01#

Yeah it's something different but seemed really obvious to me.

Reference 2 - 1.81% Coverage

RTS#

Yeah okay, so the assessment day itself there was twenty or thirty applicants and how big were the groups when you did your group tasks?

Pz.01#

I think they divvied it up so it was probably ten

RTS#

So it was quite a largeish group

Pz.01#

Yeah there was big numbers

RTS#

Okay and were there people observing when you were doing these group exercises?

Pz.01#

Yep, there was people observing, they were writing notes so you could just see the pencil scribbling away...and at the end of the assessment they would challenge you to say what do you think could have gone better so they'd start asking you questions, so it wasn't...I feel it wasn't just a case of they were watching you in the assessment, it was then how would you reflect upon it. I suspect they were still marking at that point

RTS#

So were there several of them watching the group?

Pz.01#

Four people I recall doing that, actually no maybe even more, four to seven I'd say

RTS#

Okay and so when they asked those questions was that as a group and then they just picked out different people and asked questions

Pz.01#

No I recall them asking the group and the brave were going to stand up and say their piece, again you had to respectfully chip in probably but not be the one who was pushy, a degree of humility I think probably helped [laughs]

Reference 3 - 1.29% Coverage

I just get really fed up with...I understand why you have to talk about how you'd get people off an island but we're not really there to discuss that. Again if you're going to do it, do it around a real business problem, do it about you've got really difficult stakeholders – this is genuinely what I've had at work today – you've got conflicting stakeholders, one of them wants to go one way, the other wants to go another, your sat in the middle, how do you navigate this, and I think that as a team effort is probably more effective if you're going to do team efforts – yes you absolutely have to see how people work with each other but make it more relevant to business, don't do it about getting people off an island, or...you know and then the other one was, that was more logical reasoning again so I understand why you had to do an air drop but...there must be ways of doing logical reasoning in a business capacity, that's my feeling

Reference 4 - 1.57% Coverage

I think if you're naturally somebody who wants to fight your corner more, so you're more up front but you've actually got something that's more tangible to talk about in a business case then that side of you's going to come out better. Am I going to honestly sit there and really aggressively fight with a bunch of graduate adults about who should be coming off an island? For me I just kind of, I just thought oh this

somewhat patronising, I get really irritable with those kinds of assessments, give me something real and then you'll get the real me. So the process – just to summarise – the process works, improvements would be, if you're going to do team assessments do it over something that's relevant to the job in hand, you know if you're going for a coding job you have this script, it's not working, how would you resolve it, if consultants you've got challenging stakeholders, internal and external, you've got a deadline and a budget, how do you get round it. Those kinds of things I think will...you'll get a truer understanding of somebody's approach to work and then also how are you going to convey that opinion in a room

Reference 5 - 0.74% Coverage

in terms of the first wave, I really struggled because I was trying to find...I was genuinely trying to find the job that I felt I could change the world in, I wanted to find something, you know what I...what it all comes back to is I am amazingly, I am a people person in one way and I'm not a people person in the other, when you've got difficult teams, those where everybody goes grrr, a standard day at work, but I'm a person who wants to go out and use artificial intelligence and new technologies to change the world and what drew me

Reference 6 - 0.30% Coverage

but, yes, you do find yourself in the group work, you're having to suddenly be really careful because you can't be seen as that dominating force and you can't be seen as that...maybe as loud as you were in the interview.

Reference 7 - 0.73% Coverage

That was just my perception again, maybe it's different culture to culture – if you go to J P Morgan maybe they want you to be more ruthless, you know, whoever fights the hardest fight wins. I doubt it, I think that everybody is conscious about not having too many forces like that in a firm so yes, be yourself, be different...try and find what makes you unique and I think you'll find that at university, if you do it properly you'll have a good time, you mix business with pleasure at university, balance the two you'll be find

<Internals\\121 interview transcripts\\ Pz.02# transcription> - § 3 references coded [7.63% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 1.43% Coverage

Pz.02#

Then we had a group presentation

RTS#

So this was the teamwork exercise and presentation? So tell me about that.

00:59:41

Pz.02#

You essentially would use what you had written on the written paper, you would present your ideas to everyone in the group and you would essentially be fighting for where the money should be invested, so I said naval, I'd want to invest it in naval, if someone else said space they should fight for having it in space. It would go round that way but you are all part of the same team so they just wanted to see your approach to it. Mine was listening to what everyone wanted to say and then counteracting all the arguments rather than just pushing mine, which is what a lot of them did

RTS#

A lot of them did the same as you?

Pz.02#

No, they just pushed their idea and didn't really listen to anyone else

RTS#

So why did you do that?

Pz.02#

Because that's what they wanted

RTS#

That's what you thought Cz.62# would want?

Pz.02#

Yes.

Reference 2 - 5.53% Coverage

RTS#

I hear what you're saying. So you did this group exercise and you then had to do a group presentation. So did you all have to come to an agreement on where you were going to invest or something like that?

Pz.02#

Yeah

RTS#

And so what happened in the group presentation? What did that look like?

Pz.02#

We went with naval, the one that I wanted, yeah.

RTS#

So even though you weren't pushing through your idea particularly you did actually...

Pz.02#

Yeah I did it more passively so I let them fight it out to begin with and at that point they had already got rid of space and they had some really rubbish reasoning behind it which I didn't really understand but they got rid of space because apparently Elon Musk is already in the space industry so there's no point going there so I wasn't going to argue because I didn't want it anyway, so I let them get rid of that. I was asking questions as I went along just to show I was still engaged and not just sitting back and letting, and asking questions and prodding and I guess that was the only other time I would say it was a bit underhanded what I was doing, because I would purposely ask

questions to pit different teams against each other without really saying what I was going for. Though not saying that I was going for naval but saying 'why do you think the air and defence would be better than, you know, helping the army and then the two that had chosen it would just be like well I think it's this. One of them would go and then all I would need to do is pitch naval and no-one else had been talking about naval but I'd know everything that I need to know about why air and defence is not good enough or why space isn't good enough so in the end it came down to air and defence and naval so all I did was reinstate all the negatives that the other guys in the team had said about air and defence and, you know, that way I really had a team supporting me and then we got rid of air and defence and then I pitched naval, why they should [unclear], you know the fact that there hasn't been a lot of investment in it in the past two years other than, I don't know, what Cz.62# Australia had done and Cz.62# US had done in naval but looking at that in terms of the UK they haven't done much here and our naval unit operates completely separately to Australia and the US anyway so it doesn't make a difference.

RTS#

And this was based on background information that you had from some of the research that you had done beforehand

Pz.02#

Yes, so at least it came across as credible and wasn't just saying things.

RTS#

So then when you did the presentation, even though it had converged on naval, which was your proposal, it was a group presentation, so did you each do a couple of bits each or how did that work?

Pz.02#

So we first very loosely fought it out then I would pitch naval, made sure everyone knew why I was choosing naval, then we would present naval back to the three people that were watching and that wouldn't be just me talking, it would be everyone so they wanted to see how much I could influence everyone else and how much information I could get across to them and how much buy-in I could get

01:09:48

RTS#

And was that one of the things that the group that you asked about from the stand, that you made the connections with beforehand, did they say that they were interested to see how you build a team in that process or did they just tell you about the listening to the other people.

Pz.02#

They told me all the factors that they wanted so they wanted listening, selling your idea, influencing, persuasion and then getting buy-in. So they didn't tell me how to do it but they told me what the five points that they wanted and it was easy to put everything into place when I did it

Reference 3 - 0.67% Coverage

RTS#

So you did the presentation back to them so each of you spoke a bit of some kind with that. There mustn't have been time to create any PowerPoint slides or anything like that

Pz.02#

No, we had a white board

RTS#

So I guess all those practice presentations in the business school is helpful

Pz.02#

Definitely. I mean, I was rubbish at public speaking when I first came into Cz.35#, I hated it, hated doing presentations, now I can so it really helped

<Internals\\121 interview transcripts\\ Pz.03# transcription with rts headings> - § 1 reference coded [2.20% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 2.20% Coverage

I imagine that a lot of these companies also outsource these applications to another company, an HR company to do it for them anyway, so maybe there is more resource that can put in so at least there's more people going to interview so there's less people falling out at an early stage, particularly the groups...they go to the groups and final interviews. I wonder for some...I don't know CZ.26#'s procedure in terms of their group interviews and whether they can increase the length of them to give people a better opportunity to really go further and also, from my experience of interviewing at Pearson College, if there is a way of actually mixing the groups up as well because you're often forced into one group and, as I say, it may not be conducive to letting you show your ability because you have...and I keep using the example of someone being domineering but it's not always that but it tends to be that you have one or two individuals that just don't let others speak and are constantly talking over people and they're often being marked on anyway and not being productive and really galvanising the group but it also means that you're effectively penalising other people because you just don't see them speak. So I feel like if, in those situations if you can find a way of actually splitting it up so if they're doing an hour long group interview, why don't you just revolve the groups around and let people have a different group

<Internals\\121 interview transcripts\\ Pz.05# transcription> - § 2 references coded [8.06% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 6.40% Coverage

Um and that was actually um more of a group thing. Um so...

RTS#

When you were asked in you mean?

Pz.05#

Yeah

RTS#

So the first stage was simple form. And then you got asked into the first interview and that was with a group of people?

Pz.05#

Yeah so it wasn't, it wasn't really um, like an assessment day as such because it was- it was quite individual but we had to um prioritise a list kind of as a group and then we had separate interviews.

RTS#

Prioritise a list of tasks?

Pz.05#

Yep

RTS#

Yep. As a group?

Pz.05#

Mmm

RTS#

Ok. So was that your team working exercise when you said you had to do a team working exercise in one of them - was it that?

Pz.05#

Yep.

RTS#

So just tell me a little bit more about that. Because you're one of the only team work exercise people.

Pz.05#

Oh really?

RTS#

Yeah.

Pz.05#

Um, yeah so I think there were four of us and um, there was kind of a bit at the beginning where we were just introduced to each other, um and then we'd all been told that we were going to have to do an exercise like this and we basically just had a list of tasks in a random order and we were told to put them together in a, yeah a list of priority.

RTS#

So tasks for the day as if you were at work?

Pz.05#

Yeah so (laughs) things like, um, calling a supplier to check that the um book was going to arrive on time to an event, that kind of thing

RTS#

Ok

Pz.05#

Just quite like simple everyday tasks that you would have to do, um, and...

RTS#

But you had to consensus wise as a group...

Pz.05#

Yeah discuss it and um talk about each task and why we think it's important or less important, that kind of thing.

RTS#

And were they watching you, Cz.53# people?

Pz.05#

Yeah so there was, um, a lady who, she wasn't going to be the manager for the position I think she was a level above but she wasn't the line manager. Um, and also someone from HR I believe.

RTS#

Ok. And they stayed in the room?

Pz.05#

Yep.

RTS#

And did they intervene at all or they just sat back and watched?

Pz.05#

No.

RTS#

And how did you find that so three (Rowena note - it's two I think) complete strangers?

Pz.05#

Yeah it's very interesting. Um, because people just have such different personalities and I think in that situation I am always so conscious of what they're thinking, the p- the people that are assessing what they're thinking of each person and what they're looking for. Um, and it's hard to know whether they want someone that's gonna take the lead, someone that's gonna sit and kind of organise everyone, um because they're obviously going to be looking for a skill that compliments that role so it's quite difficult to know kind of what- what role to play in that.

RTS#

Yeah. So did you get any feeling from them on what they were looking for or you couldn't tell?

Pz.05#

No not at all really it was all quite...

RTS#

So how did you choose what to do then?

Pz.05#

I think I just did what was most natural to me, which is to be an organiser and um, think about the tasks, think about how we're going to get it done in that time um but also at the same time making sure that I was quite um vocal as well so that I was expressing everything that I was thinking um because obviously they- they don't know what's going on in your head so in that situation you need to explain things, I guess.

Reference 2 - 1.66% Coverage

RTS#

Yeah, ok. So you shared some of how you felt about that whole process with how you felt about the result but what about other elements of the process, what did you think about the teamworking prioritisation exercise? How did that make you feel and did you think that was a good technique?

Pz.05#

Yeah, I- I actually do think group exercises are a very good way of assessing people um I think it- it depends, it depends what kind of person you are but I think it can put people at ease,

um, being able to communicate with people that are in the same situation with you, um, and I do think it is very telling of- of what that person is like and what kind of employee they would be as well because your working in teams in- in any situation really um, in a job, so I think it can show things that people don't necessarily think that they're showing as well.

<Internals\\121 interview transcripts\\ Pz.07# transcription> - § 7 references coded [12.26% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.44% Coverage

think it had like four parts it to, so it had an interview, then it had a group assessment which was based around, like, you're lost on a desert island, these are your items, how do you prioritise the items, and then there's a panel who are watching you do it, so it's always a bit nice and awkward.

Reference 2 - 1.17% Coverage

The group exercise, how many people were in the group?

Pz.07#

About six of us

RTS#

So, we were just in one room and then there was the panel in the same room watching you? How many people were on the panel?

Pz.07#

I remember it being at least the same amount so probably about six or seven people

RTS#

So, what did you think about that experience?

Pz.07#

That was actually fine because, I don't know, we'd done quite a lot of stuff out here...it was also quite a fun task so I was just quite interested in it. My group were really nice, which made a difference because sometimes you go to these things and you've got one very outspoken person and it means that you can't really get on with it whereas this group could work together really easily, so yeah, it was fine, that was the easiest part.

Reference 3 - 5.87% Coverage

And then we went to do the interviews the next day and it was really unfair actually because they had two different graduate schemes and I was applying for the marketing one and they also had the engineers on the same selection day doing the same tasks. I just thought, it's so unfair, the engineers clearly are applying for a very different role and they are basically being forced to do marketing tasks. So we did a group exercise and it was on genuinely marketing – it was so unfair – it was on 'how do you get people to travel the UK more and how do you like to support...' oh no no, forget the travelling the UK bit, it was name a marketing campaign to support prostate cancer, which was there charity of choice, so people came up with some like naff ideas, like we should get buckets and stand in the street and that's naff... [short discussion about whether this sort of collection is still allowed].

So they came up with all these ideas and the poor engineers probably didn't even know what on earth this was; they're used to like numbers and putting things together. So then I came up with the idea of [unclear] aren't right, I'm going to lead this one because it's not going anywhere, so I stood up, got the piece of...whiteboard, put it in the middle of the room and I was like, right, let's think about it differently and there was right, so prostate cancer...people obviously don't like look for prostate cancer and that's the problem, it's very like, oh we shouldn't talk about it, and everyone felt we should talk about it, it's cancer, and I was like we've got to talk about it, that's the whole point that we need to put it out there, so I was like, hey, people that don't like...basing it on [encouraging] people to go for more examinations and there's also places in the UK where people never visit as well so I was okay why don't we find these hidden places and then link it in with like finding prostate cancer and how people don't go here and they also don't like to search for prostate cancer. So we came up with all these different slogans about how you should search for things and how you should travel the UK and then we put on like 5p from every ticket that's sold outside of these regions now goes to prostate cancer if you do that. Yes, so we did that, that was really good, I was like this is the best start I could get, it's so good. Obviously the marketing people were like [cheers] and the engineers were just [sad sound], it was really bad. So that was good and I remember that being a very energetic task, it was good. I was probably the annoying person who takes over but, oh well. And then we had to do...

RTS#

So did you have to present back?

Pz.07#

Yes, you have to be with the group the whole time and then you have to present back afterwards.

RTS#

To the same group that was watching you?

Pz.07#

Yes

RTS#

So that's weird: so you've kind of figured it all out, they're watching you and then you turn around and [give the presentation]?

Pz.07#

Yeah, so it's not about the presentation in the end, it's more about how you actually get to that. I remember thinking, oh god, the point is I'll talk as much...I'll really encourage them to talk...okay are you happy with that and it was in the feedback after, 'you're very inclusive, you're very good', so I was like oh okay, that's good.

RTS#

Why did you do that?

Pz.07#

Because I felt really bad for them and I thought they probably aren't the most confident people to speak up and you don't want to appear very overpowering so you need to include other people's ideas, it isn't just us. So I was, maybe you should speak up a bit and I guess you kind of know there are people who are going to include

other people and kind of get the point of this is a group exercise and not just you taking the reins

RTS#

I was going to say, you're competing with the engineers but I guess what you just said explains it then

Pz.07#

You want to be confident in yourself, knowing you are giving good ideas also [unclear] you include everyone

Reference 4 - 0.21% Coverage

RTS#

So how long was the group exercise and presentation?

Pz.07#

It was probably about similar. They were long...the whole day was quite long

Reference 5 - 2.86% Coverage

And then we had to do a group task and...what was it about...oh it was about people being made redundant and one of the stores was going to close and you had to basically build a process to make the people redundant, say what your priorities are and how you are actually going to deliver the message, what would happen if somebody disputed it, deal with that process. We did that in a group of people and that was just awful, it just didn't click. We didn't get long and it almost like a big argumentative. In the Cz.43# one you actually worked as a group and you could really feel it whereas this was, you say something and then somebody would be like, 'good answer but I actually think...' and it was a bunch of the same sort of people and it was quite interesting because quite a few of them were from Teach First [where you] get fast-tracked on to the graduate schemes from that so you don't have to do any of the first stages, you get fast-tracked to assessment centres and on my Cz.60# one there happened to be a few of them. And they were very different, they were very 'teachery' and so I think it almost didn't work that well. So, yeah, that was that and then I remember I got feedback on that and they were like, 'you good and that was fine', and they were actually 'we preferred the position that you played in it, like you didn't take charge of it, which was a good thing' and they were, 'we actually look for people who don't lead the way, we look for people who sit back and give good information and also try and include everyone', which I think is probably how I knew how quickly everyone on later schemes, so I think that was good. So that was fine because I'd thought I'd messed that one up, I didn't say enough on that one but actually I didn't get bad feedback on it so it's fine. So I basically read the whole assessment centre wrong. I think I did well on the things I didn't and thought the other way round on the other ones.

Reference 6 - 0.48% Coverage

So I think almost things that went wrong were quite good, so when you're working in a group that you don't like the people in, someone's not pulling their weight, that is a

really good life lesson and it's so much better than things going perfectly and you getting an amazing grade because it actually teaches you how to behave.

Reference 7 - 1.23% Coverage

RTS#

We do have students quite often who complain about group work. What would you say to that?

Pz.07#

You can't choose your team when you come to work and you need to be able to...I see it as an opportunity to make people get on your side. If someone is very unmotivated, don't see that as a problem, you can change the way they're feeling and that's such an achievement for yourself anyway and if you really need an excuse for why it's going to be beneficial to you, you can then go and use it in your interviews because you've actually turned a situation around. So, yeah, you'll never get a perfect team and it's your responsibility to make every team you work in work for you

RTS#

So you wouldn't suggest that we cut out all group work?

Pz.07#

No! Definitely not and I'd mix up the groups that you know are going to cause trouble.

<Internals\\121 interview transcripts\\ Pz.09# transcription> - § 1 reference coded [0.43% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.43% Coverage

Pz.09

So the assessment day was...I seem to remember there were three tasks. There was a group exercise in which...I don't know we played with like bean bags and things like that and we had to build a channel to one side of the room to the other and that sort of thing as a team.

<Internals\\121 interview transcripts\\ Pz.10# transcription> - § 1 reference coded [0.74% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 0.74% Coverage

was very open about my teamwork and how I like teamwork and I described my personality and everything, and I think that was one of the questions, like describe what type of person you are and I described what time of person I am and I'm bubbly and everything and I think they liked that.

<Internals\\121 interview transcripts\\ Pz.13# transcription> - § 4 references coded [8.74% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 4.57% Coverage

So I went in there and there was about ten other candidates so it was me...being the twelfth. So when we did get there it was just a bunch of random tasks so it was more tasks that check how you interact with others so one of the tasks was you were stranded on an island and there's a list of ten items you have to decide which five you're going to keep and they were just looking at how we're discussing, who's taking the lead and all those little bits that they're [unclear]. And then throughout the evening there were other different ones where five people that you would have to save in the world, having to justify your decision and then...so those were the first two tasks and at the end of it was more of a task where it was built about a role. So the role was in marketing and in groups, in different several groups, we had to justify...we had to come up with an idea of how we'd sell [unclear] to others so the company, what they actually offer is a service that helps tech graduates find jobs so we had to find a way to promote that to other universities. And, sorry, in groups we were looking at different ways that we can promote it and we gave a presentation at the end so they broke it up into teambuilding exercises and then at the end actually skill[?]-based on the role.

RTS#

Okay, that's fascinating. So with that, how big were the groups that they broke you into?

Pz.13#

It was about four, five maximum

RTS#

So it was two or three groups?

Pz.13#

Yeah

RTS#

Okay and how long did that whole day take?

Pz.13#

It was about four hours, I'd say, because we did break for lunch in between as well so we were there for a bit. It was very casual at the beginning and then it became more professional

RTS#

And so you were with one group when you did the island task and then another group when you did the save five people in the world task?

Pz.13#

Yes, they kept rotating us

RTS#

Were they watching you and observing you?

Pz.13#

Yes, there were about four of them just observing

RTS#

So because there were two or three groups going at the same time, was it like four of them moving around or...?

Pz.13#

Yes, they were in the corners of the room and they were just circling round. Sometimes they would come and talk to us and see what's happening

RTS#

Okay and were they taking notes?

Pz.13#

Yes, they were taking notes

RTS#

So there were four panel members, I guess, we'll call it.

Reference 2 - 2.38% Coverage

Pz.13#

With group interviews I think it's a good way to see how you actually interact with people straight away and stuff but I do think it was a bit of a...it kind of [unclear] interviewed us all one by one because as someone that's a bit introverted it does take a few moments to feel comfortable, I feel if it was a one-one-one, face-to-face I could have explained myself better and actually brought my character across. So I do wish they had done one-to-one interviews as well but I do feel that working in groups is a great way in actually bringing about their confidence, seeing how they interact with everyone. I did enjoy that, I enjoyed speaking with everyone

RTS#

It sounds like you did well on the day – you had a lot of exercises to do and a lot of talking to do. So it's not so much that you think there's anything wrong with this process but you should have had the one-to-one as well?

Pz.13#

Yeah, I mean because different situations people [unclear] very differently I think and you've got to just...you've got to weight it all a bit together. Someone could be very cocky and loud-mouthed and you think this guy's very...when they're in an office environment they might become a problem, so I think it's looking deeper into everything

Reference 3 - 0.93% Coverage

So, yeah, on the day when we arrived it started off with normal teambuilding exercises

RTS#

When you say 'normal teambuilding exercises', I don't know what they are so tell me!

Pz.13#

There was about seven of us so we were split into two groups and the first exercise was we had to draw three different things so it was like Pictionary and the other group had to guess what it was. I guess it was just a way to see our character as we were joking about it and stuff, it was very casual,

Reference 4 - 0.87% Coverage

And so when it does come to group interviews, I mean I usually hate that idea of a group interview but when I do get there I feel comfortable but prior to the interview I'm thinking, who am I going to meet, shall I say hello but when I do get there on the day it's a very different environment than me stressing in my room so I guess there's

not much thought put into that, but yeah it's mainly just one-to-one questions and what other tasks they give me

<Internals\\121 interview transcripts\\ Pz.21# transcription> - § 2 references coded [3.66% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 2.73% Coverage

It was all day from 9 'til like 5 and it was a group...it was like a group...task essentially. Throughout the day they put different tasks on, like very simple ones which is really literally it blew my mind in how silly it was, right, like very basic getting to know people, kind of what you do in a classroom on the first day of school, right, things like that

RTS#

So describe the day to me, so when you arrived what was the first task?

Pz.21#

So the first task was like getting to know everyone so write something...write a secret about yourself on a post-it note, scrunch it up and throw it into the middle of the room

RTS#

[laughs]

Pz.21#

No [unclear], nothing. Go in, pick one up, if it's your own, throw it back in without being caught, but you pick one up and read it and you had to like guess or like go around the class...the room and talk to people, like is this...you go up to who you think it is and if it is you're talking about your life experience, things like that. That was a good kind of icebreaker, I guess

01:01:56

RTS#

Were they observing you doing that?

Pz.21#

So yeah, I forgot to say, so there's eight of us and there's twelve of them, yeah four here, four there, and four there...honestly it was like we don't know who's looking at who

RTS#

So four on each side of the room, watching you is like a group of people in the middle

Pz.21#

It was like a rectangular table in the middle. It is daunting, you know, it's the first time I'd ever gone to an assessment centre like that

RTS#

Were they taking notes?

Pz.21#

Yeah, so some of them were [unclear] and one of the tasks was, all right, now you guys need to pick somebody dead or alive in their prime that you feel represents you or that you feel that you would like to represent, right so I picked Alex Ferguson, Sir Alex and I had to explain why, why it's to do with you and you had to get up and

speak to eight people. I think that actually highlighted presentation skills and how you can speak and how you kind of talk to a group and looking around a room

RTS#

Were you talking just to the other seven applicants or were you also talking to the twelve around them?

Pz.21#

We were told to ignore them

RTS#

Okay, easier said than done [laughs]

Pz.21#

Yes especially because I had two on my right shoulder, two on my left shoulder here when I was speaking to people so it was like you know you can feel them burning behind you

Reference 2 - 0.92% Coverage

Then the next task was, right think about that person that you have and they split us into two fours and they were like look, you've got only two of you can stay on the boat, two of these characters that you've chosen, now you have to...they split us up into two sides of the room, they were like you basically have to explain your case on why they should stay on the boat or why they shouldn't, explain the reasons why and things like that. And then the next task...there was no result in that, they just all right, okay...there was one lady running that and she was like oh right, okay, great so you guys...like there was no right or wrong answer or anything so you couldn't really figure out what they were looking for and so it was you know like loads of those kind of tasks, those tasks that start in the afternoon

<Internals\\121 interview transcripts\\ Pz.16# transcription> - § 1 reference coded [3.98% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 3.98% Coverage

There was me and six...there was six of us in total so me and five other people but we got the impression there was supposed to be more on the day but they'd dropped out, and we did...we had face-to-face interviews there, we were kind of split up into groups and moved around so we did a mixture of face-to-face interviews, an Excel test. We were given a brief to talk about Premiership - sportspeople and whether they're overpaid, split into two groups, three of each and we had to debate or argue our side for each one

RTS#

Okay so is that the team work exercise?

Pz.16#

That would have been the teamwork exercise, yeah

RTS#

And then presented back

Pz.16#

Yeah and then kind of got...then on the day they told us who for, they did the best presentation and then we were told that we would find out more, whether we'd got the job or not later on

RTS#

So they told you that your group did the best presentation

Pz.16#

Yeah, yes it did. So we were arguing but...we centred it around football which is why I keep saying footballers – so we argued that they weren't overpaid but everybody in the room thought that they were overpaid but our argument swayed them out of the two so yeah, that was quite good, we were happy with that. And then...yeah, the next day I got a telephone call saying...with a job offer and there were actually three jobs up for grabs but none of us knew what job we'd be getting

RTS#

Were they all sort of finance-related?

Pz.16#

Yeah so they were all accountancy based and we were told then on the day about each job and the managers of each one told us more information but then...

RTS#

On the assessment day

Pz.16#

Yeah but then the next day we were told, you've been offered such and such a role

RTS#

Okay so you knew about all three and then the next day you were told which one you were being offered

<Internals\\121 interview transcripts\\ Pz.18# transcription> - § 6 references coded [8.17% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 1.56% Coverage

of the day of what would happen, so the idea was that half of the people would actually go home at lunchtime who weren't successful in the group activities – that's why it was stressful! – it felt very X-Factor style, but I don't know if they're still doing it this way now but we were split into groups, did one of the team activities, then came back to wait while the other groups went round, then did the other one. That was, one of them was a kind of more of a paper challenge and we had to solve a problem but we all had different information so we obviously had to communicate with each other to work out each other had.

RTS#

So how many of you were in the group?

Pz.18#

I think six, about six of us in the small group, so we all had like a brief but there were slightly different instructions on each brief that collectively gave us the whole picture but we each individually had part of the picture (but we didn't realise that until obviously into the challenge). The other one was more of a, I guess, not team

building as such but coming up with an idea and presenting it back. So again that took quite a while doing all of that and because we

Reference 2 - 0.45% Coverage

RTS#

So, let's go back to the assessment day, how many applicants were there approximately altogether?

Pz.18#

Probably about twenty

RTS#

So, there were three groups-ish, probably?

Pz.18#

Yeah, three or four groups, yeah

RTS#

And how many got through to the afternoon?

Pz.18#

We were less than half so about eight/nine, more or less

Reference 3 - 1.51% Coverage

RTS#

So, after that presentation you were then broken up into groups and so you went to a different room or something for each of the groups and so was someone watching you then and was that one of the two people or someone else?

00:14:52

Pz.18#

No, so the two people then they left and their spiel was 'do the presentation' and then it was just the 'apprentice' in the room with us so she was just the one just kind of making sure we were all okay in the room we were based in, then there were two break-out rooms so there were always two groups going at one time and then either one or two groups waiting. So, then we did a kind of a bit of a rotation. I don't think any group went from one activity straight into the other one; I think they always had a break in between each group activity. And then, within the activity itself, there were about four maybe five managers from CZ.20# watching each of us, so they were all...we were told afterwards they were all allocated kind of one of us to observe or as there were slightly more applicants some had to watch two of us or something so it was quite intense in one sense.

Reference 4 - 2.08% Coverage

Pz.18#

Yes, so they were all just sitting either at the edge of the room or the front of the room together in a line and then there were either one table in the middle or a couple of tables and we were just in the room. The room was where we did the

presentation, it had a whiteboard in there, I think there were some flipcharts as well, but yeah it was just very simple, probably slightly smaller...no probably about this size

RTS#

So, each of you were given some kind of sheet of paper or some papers and do you remember what the problem was or vaguely what kind of problem it was?

Pz.18#

Ohh so the first one was more numerical so you were given a scenario and then various criteria so it might have said that 'Judy only works Tuesdays and Wednesdays' but over there it said 'Bill likes oranges but Judy likes peaches' so it's all these kinds of bits of information about characters but you had to work out 'therefore...' I can remember exactly what it was but it was trying to work out who...it involved various people or characters and we had to match who...or identify if there was a person as an answer or not. I remember our group we didn't get the answer but, obviously, the whole point is how you work as a team, how you communicate. Obviously it would be nice to get the answer but... In terms of the time actually I think we had, I think it was about fifteen minutes so not that long. With the presentation one we had just the one brief for all of us so we all knew exactly what we were doing and then had to discuss it and then present it.

Reference 5 - 1.47% Coverage

RTS#

So with the 'oranges and lemons', what do you think they're looking for in that exercise?

Pz.18#

I think first of all analytical skills, how quickly you could really quick up or read what information we had then realise so-and-so doesn't have the same information as me, what do you have, right let's map this out, so probably our ability to observe and analyse what information we had. Communication to communicate with one another about what we had, probably listening to each other because we could all just jump in or one person could, so how we communicate as a team, maybe did we take the lead, what role did we assume within the team, I think probably was there a timekeeper, did someone bother to take the time or be the nominated writer or leader. I think how much as an individual I participated in the challenge and maybe how useful was that information to the team. So analytical, how did we communicate

RTS#

Teamwork?

Pz.18#

Teambuilding, yeah. I would say those would be the key ones from my understanding but they didn't say specifically what they were looking for.

Reference 6 - 1.10% Coverage

RTS#

Yeah, so what do you think that they were looking for then, for that particular exercise?

Pz.18#

I guess how well we can come to a decision as a team, how we can...yeah, I guess looking for the solution, coming up maybe with an innovative idea so how, maybe what are our creative traits perhaps, time keeping definitely, being able to prioritise, being able to involve everyone because some people love presenting, some people really hate it, so trying to give people a platform if they want to talk and try and involve them but not let too many people overpower perhaps. And then just what are, how well do we present under pressure. Any other ones...I mean there must have been really more kind of, maybe more technical ones they might have looked at but from my perspective those areas seemed the obvious ones

<Internals\\121 interview transcripts\\ Pz.19# transcription> - § 3 references coded [8.87% Coverage]

Reference 1 - 2.70% Coverage

I was invited for a face-to-face interview. And then um ([whispers] face to face where I met with the lady) and then I came back to do the team ex... no, did I come back? Or it was on the same day, I can't remember exactly, it's been so long. Um, my, no it was on the same day. It was in the afternoon. Sorry, it was in the afternoon because we were also being observed in terms of how we were relating to the other candidates who were sitting...

RTS#

During the team working exercise ok.

Pz.19#

Yes. And uh, which felt a little bit intrusive but I suppose they were just trying to look out for who leads or who takes the initiative of actually going and speaking with other people. And um had a brief meeting with the same person who interviewed me after the team exercise, and um again um raising questions in terms of you know how did they assess because I noticed that we were being observed so what were they looking for. And um...

RTS#

You asked them?

Pz.19#

Yes. Yes (laughs).

RTS#

That's what want to know so that's very convenient. Did they answer though?

Pz.19#

Uh yes, she did. Um so there were things like, um, being able to actually um, you know, liaise and communicate with people working, because what she said was um obviously in their, um in that particular job role, it was also the fact that they had offices all over the country. So one day you could be in one office the next day you could be put in a different office and having to work with people that you've never met with before. So they had to make sure that the person was comfortable in you know a completely different environment and still be able to communicate and do what they were supposed to do on the day. And um, I actually had a laugh with her, I

can't remember her name, I think her name was Sarah. Um I had a laugh with her, so I said, you see it's not just you observing us, I was observing you as well.

Reference 2 - 5.65% Coverage

RTS#

So tell me about the actual group exercise. Can you remember what- how that worked?

Pz.19#

Yes. So we walked in and we were sat in an open space. And there were um glassed offices you know, throughout on the side. And me being me, my usual chatty self, I just walked in and went, 'hi' and just started talking to candidates. And um so we had to do a short presentation on... so we were given a scenario, ok. What would we do in case of- I can't remember exactly the scenarios- but what we do in a given situation? So we had to work as a team because- and it made sense because like she explained is sometimes you would have an idea that you think would work well, but another person in your team may not think so. So it was- it was not just a question of pitching your idea but also trying to, I think, find out whether you could actually collaborate with other people with differing ideas. Which was really great. And um, we presented so there was three of us in a group, and it was me and two other guys, and um we did a short presentation, which was about ten minutes, and um yeah so that went really well. And um, there was some questions.

RTS#

So who was in the audience, to watch the presentation?

Pz.19#

There was two of them. So there was the lady, Sarah, and there was somebody else with her. (Whispered) I can't recall the name.

RTS#

So the two people from the company?

Pz.19#

Yes, from the company.

RTS#

And were they also the people who were observing you during your exercise?

Pz.19#

Yes.

RTS#

Ok. And how long did you have to do it, do you remember?

Pz.19#

Ten minutes.

RTS#

Oh, that was quick!

Pz.19#

Yeah.

RTS#

So ten minutes to, so you're given a scenario and then, ten minutes to pull some ideas together and then do a presentation?

Pz.19#

Absolutely, to try and resolve the situation what would you do. So we had ten minutes to present, you know, what would we do, the steps that we would take, how would that you know, align with HR policies etc. So it was about HR but a specific situation I can't remember. Um...

RTS#

So you don't know these people?

Pz.19#

No.

RTS#

You're given a scenario.

Pz.19#

Yep.

RTS#

You've got to read the scenario, discuss

Pz.19#

Yep.

RTS#

Then present.

Pz.19#

Then present.

RTS#

All in ten minutes.

Pz.19#

No we had half an hour to work on it, but we had ten minutes to present.

RTS#

Gotcha ok, so thirty minutes to prepare.

Pz.19#

Yes.

RTS#

Ten minutes to present.

Pz.19#

Correct.

RTS#

Ok and what did you think of that as a technique if you like for looking at team building?

Pz.19#

Do you know what I *really*, really liked it. Purely because it's also what happens when you work within a team. So it was very grounded in the sense that ok this is what happens when you're part of an HR team or any team that you work with. You may have an idea that you think is absolutely brilliant but someth- somebody else might think, 'oh it's absolute rubbish' and you know, it's against this policy or we can't do it for that specific reason. And working with people who you don't know was also very nice because at the same time, one of them, I remember I use- I was- like, prodding him to answer questions because he was so nervous. The other person was confident. And um, just like having to get them to open up and although they were very knowledgeable, but they lacked the confidence in terms of

communicating with somebody else. So it was also very interesting to see how other people react to the situation. So that- that was, you know, what I really liked. Because again when you're part of a team you have your usual chatty person who will just talk about anything, you also have your, you know, your team member who's very you know, shy or reserved or not necessarily reserved but not as chatty as you are. So again working with different personalities and different types of people was really, really interesting. And also at the same time like, knowing that you were being observed (laughs) made it quite interesting,

Reference 3 - 0.52% Coverage

Pz.19#

And um after that, so after the assessment, after the presentation, um again we- we had the area so they came and spoke to all of us and thanked us, there was about - (whispers) how many of us were there in the room? There must have been about, I would say shortly under 20.

RTS#

Ok. So there were six groups? Or seven groups of people?

Pz.19#

Yes.

RTS#

Ok.

Sample four

Summary view of the node "teamwork".

Name	In Folder	References	Coverage
Pz.01# transcription	Internals\\121 interview transcripts	7	8.93%
Pz.02# transcription	Internals\\121 interview transcripts	3	7.63%
Pz.03# transcription with rts headings	Internals\\121 interview transcripts	1	2.20%
Pz.05# transcription	Internals\\121 interview transcripts	2	8.06%
Pz.07# transcription	Internals\\121 interview transcripts	7	12.26%
Pz.09# transcription	Internals\\121 interview transcripts	1	0.43%
Pz.10# transcription	Internals\\121 interview transcripts	1	0.74%
Pz.13# transcription	Internals\\121 interview transcripts	4	8.74%
Pz.21# transcription	Internals\\121 interview transcripts	2	3.66%
Pz.16# transcription	Internals\\121 interview transcripts	1	3.98%
Pz.18# transcription	Internals\\121 interview transcripts	6	8.17%
Pz.19# transcription	Internals\\121 interview transcripts	3	8.87%

Appendix 8 – Nodes

This table has been extracted from the project in NVivo and shows the nodes created relevant to this thesis, along with the number of sources (ie transcripts) where it appeared, and the total number of references to that node. Note that where it reads zero, this simply means the child nodes have not been aggregated into the parent nodes.

Parents nodes	Child nodes	Sources	References	Created On	Created By
Nodes by interview question		0	0	19/08/2018 10:03	RTS
	Checking statistics	6	7	19/08/2018 10:04	RTS
	Checking stats	1	1	19/08/2018 10:17	RTS
	Current job application process	21	24	19/08/2018 10:03	RTS
	Job application A	22	24	19/08/2018 10:03	RTS
	Job application B	20	21	19/08/2018 10:03	RTS
	Job application C	7	7	19/08/2018 10:04	RTS
	Job application D	2	3	19/08/2018 17:16	RTS
Overall approach to job-hunting		22	90	19/08/2018 10:03	RTS
	frameworks	3	3	25/08/2018 12:19	RTS
	key words	9	18	19/08/2018 17:14	RTS
	number of applications	3	3	25/08/2018 11:57	RTS
	proactivity	2	3	19/08/2018 17:08	RTS
	interleaving	1	1	26/08/2018 11:27	RTS
	structured approach to job-hunting	2	3	26/08/2018 11:26	RTS
	dream jobs	1	1	16/09/2018 14:45	RTS
	Nerves	1	1	16/09/2018 15:43	RTS
	check out atmosphere	1	1	15/09/2018 08:56	RTS
	arrive early	1	1	15/09/2018 08:56	RTS
	need to get job	1	1	15/09/2018 08:29	RTS
	Cool	3	6	16/09/2018 15:38	RTS
	selective of how many jobs to apply for	1	2	28/09/2018 11:38	RTS

	manual search	1	1	30/09/2018 11:09	RTS
	Linkedin	7	12	28/09/2018 11:32	RTS
	monster jobs	1	1	28/09/2018 11:29	RTS
Dress		17	20	19/08/2018 10:04	RTS
Work experience during study		21	28	19/08/2018 10:03	RTS
Ideas on helping students		23	123	19/08/2018 10:03	RTS
	techno training	4	6	25/08/2018 12:28	RTS
	teaching software	2	3	19/08/2018 17:05	RTS
	broaden horizons	1	1	25/08/2018 12:26	RTS
	make it hard	3	3	19/08/2018 17:10	RTS
	job-hunting techniques	3	4	25/08/2018 12:27	RTS
	making most of opportunities	1	1	19/08/2018 17:07	RTS
	independence	1	1	19/08/2018 17:07	RTS
	bring in companies	1	1	25/08/2018 18:19	RTS
	extra curricula	2	2	26/08/2018 13:56	RTS
	help them get work experience	4	6	26/08/2018 13:53	RTS
	helping network	2	4	26/08/2018 13:55	RTS
	set tough expectations	2	3	26/08/2018 17:30	RTS
	alumni session	1	1	26/08/2018 17:30	RTS
	go to companies	1	1	27/08/2018 10:20	RTS
	networking help	4	6	27/08/2018 10:21	RTS
	individual advice	2	2	27/08/2018 10:19	RTS
	stand out training	3	3	27/08/2018 14:33	RTS
	learn to sell yourself	1	1	02/09/2018 16:15	RTS
	linked in training	1	1	27/08/2018 14:32	RTS
	make most of spare time	1	2	02/09/2018 16:16	RTS
	unexpected study tasks	5	6	02/09/2018 16:18	RTS
	small informal networking opps	1	1	15/09/2018 11:04	RTS

	personalised plans	1	1	15/09/2018 10:59	RTS
	mirror workplace	1	1	15/09/2018 11:11	RTS
	allow failure	1	1	15/09/2018 11:00	RTS
	analysing strengths and weaknesses	1	1	15/09/2018 08:47	RTS
	become proactive	1	1	15/09/2018 08:45	RTS
	strengths and weaknesses	1	1	15/09/2018 10:59	RTS
	work out what they want	1	2	16/09/2018 15:25	RTS
	shadowing	1	1	15/09/2018 11:02	RTS
	proactivity	1	1	15/09/2018 10:58	RTS
	conversation on views	1	1	22/09/2018 14:55	RTS
	design assessment centre	1	1	22/09/2018 15:00	RTS
	peer to peer interviews	2	2	22/09/2018 11:53	RTS
	where to look	1	1	22/09/2018 11:51	RTS
	dress up fridays	1	1	30/09/2018 16:49	RTS
	human	1	1	30/09/2018 15:17	RTS
	pearson connection	1	1	06/10/2018 13:06	RTS
	practice assessment days	1	1	28/09/2018 11:55	RTS
	video interview pracs	1	1	24/09/2018 10:24	RTS
	create start up	1	2	23/09/2018 10:41	RTS
	presentation practice	1	1	30/09/2018 15:20	RTS
	mentors	1	4	06/10/2018 12:59	RTS
	integrated skills	1	1	22/09/2018 11:53	RTS
	application prac	1	1	29/09/2018 15:51	RTS
	cv writing	1	1	24/09/2018 10:24	RTS
	job-hunting skills	2	2	24/09/2018 10:21	RTS
	mock interviews	2	3	30/09/2018 15:20	RTS
	selling students to companies	1	1	23/09/2018 10:36	RTS
	practical projects	1	1	07/10/2018 13:57	RTS

Role of university		23	96	19/08/2018 10:03	RTS
	exploration	6	15	15/09/2018 10:55	RTS
	new perspectives	1	3	06/10/2018 12:23	RTS
	learn to run own business	3	4	15/09/2018 08:42	RTS
	confidence purpose of uni	5	14	27/08/2018 14:15	RTS
	company contacts	1	2	15/09/2018 08:37	RTS
	business contacts	1	1	15/09/2018 08:43	RTS
	talent pipeline	1	1	22/09/2018 14:51	RTS
	soft skills	4	5	22/09/2018 14:48	RTS
	wake up	1	1	22/09/2018 14:56	RTS
	collaboration	1	1	15/09/2018 08:34	RTS
	growing up	1	1	28/09/2018 11:45	RTS
	knowledge	3	5	28/09/2018 11:47	RTS
	hygiene factor	2	3	23/09/2018 10:32	RTS
	indicates skills	1	1	21/09/2018 10:32	RTS
	frameworks	4	4	23/09/2018 10:27	RTS
	status	1	1	23/09/2018 10:29	RTS
	academic learning	1	4	23/09/2018 10:27	RTS
	talent spotting	1	1	30/09/2018 16:47	RTS
	up to date	1	1	30/09/2018 11:24	RTS
	second syllabus	2	2	28/09/2018 11:46	RTS
	keeps options open	1	1	21/09/2018 10:34	RTS
	expertise	1	1	28/09/2018 12:17	RTS
Final comments		2	3	19/08/2018 10:04	RTS
Nodes by voice		0	0	19/08/2018 10:18	RTS
	P1	1	182	19/08/2018 10:18	RTS
	P2	1	90	19/08/2018 10:18	RTS
	P3	1	106	19/08/2018 10:18	RTS

	P4	1	95	19/08/2018 10:18	RTS
	P5	1	142	26/08/2018 10:16	RTS
	P6	1	198	26/08/2018 16:30	RTS
	P7	1	122	26/08/2018 16:39	RTS
	P8	1	284	27/08/2018 12:04	RTS
	P9	1	127	27/08/2018 17:51	RTS
	P10	1	221	09/09/2018 08:55	RTS
	P11	1	80	15/09/2018 10:26	RTS
	P12	1	164	16/09/2018 12:30	RTS
	P13	1	140	16/09/2018 12:42	RTS
	P14	1	134	16/09/2018 12:45	RTS
	P15	1	135	22/09/2018 13:40	RTS
	P16	1	89	23/09/2018 10:02	RTS
	P17	1	121	24/09/2018 09:13	RTS
	P18	1	110	28/09/2018 09:47	RTS
	P19	1	119	29/09/2018 13:46	RTS
	P20	1	121	29/09/2018 14:01	RTS
	P21	1	99	29/09/2018 14:13	RTS
	P22	1	94	06/10/2018 11:11	RTS
	P23	1	125	07/10/2018 09:55	RTS
	RTS#	23	3107	19/08/2018 10:18	RTS
Companies		23	118	25/08/2018 12:30	RTS
Stage 1 finding adverts		23	131	19/08/2018 15:05	RTS
	trigger	23	72	19/08/2018 13:36	RTS
	trigger (2)	1	3	19/08/2018 16:31	RTS
	web search	1	1	25/08/2018 11:58	RTS
	web search criteria	1	1	25/08/2018 12:00	RTS
	cv	12	24	19/08/2018 15:02	RTS

	cv	5	5	02/09/2018 10:42	RTS
	application	15	31	19/08/2018 16:42	RTS
	job adverts	1	1	22/09/2018 11:33	RTS
	digital job-hunting technique	2	3	24/11/2018 14:43	RTS
	google search	1	1	28/09/2018 11:29	RTS
	job sites	4	5	22/09/2018 14:18	RTS
Stage 2 employer activities		23	503	19/08/2018 14:49	RTS
	interview	22	170	19/08/2018 13:23	RTS
	competency based questions	8	15	19/08/2018 13:37	RTS
	video interview	8	12	19/08/2018 14:02	RTS
	skype	1	1	19/08/2018 16:56	RTS
	situational questions	5	7	19/08/2018 16:49	RTS
	interview	11	43	26/08/2018 10:21	RTS
	interview (2)	1	5	26/08/2018 16:45	RTS
	phone interview	3	3	26/08/2018 16:56	RTS
	questions background hobby	1	1	02/09/2018 10:29	RTS
	interview (3)	4	17	09/09/2018 14:59	RTS
	authentic exercise	15	27	19/08/2018 13:24	RTS
	real exercise	1	1	10/11/2018 11:58	RTS
	team work	12	38	19/08/2018 13:42	RTS
	test	17	63	19/08/2018 13:39	RTS
	game	2	3	02/09/2018 09:31	RTS
	online games	1	2	24/12/2018 12:01	RTS
	coding exercise	1	2	16/09/2018 14:23	RTS
	other exercise	12	25	19/08/2018 13:28	RTS
	mentoring task	1	1	21/09/2018 10:09	RTS
	role play	5	8	26/08/2018 11:15	RTS
	analysis exercise	4	5	07/10/2018 11:08	RTS

	task	1	1	21/09/2018 09:34	RTS
	case study	1	1	16/09/2018 14:37	RTS
	pitch	1	1	02/09/2018 10:21	RTS
	presentation	15	36	19/08/2018 13:46	RTS
	written exercise	8	17	19/08/2018 16:42	RTS
	assessment centre	11	27	25/08/2018 10:54	RTS
	grad scheme	16	40	25/08/2018 10:51	RTS
	grad scheme opinion	8	9	27/08/2018 09:35	RTS
	Grad schemes	1	1	28/09/2018 09:47	RTS
	unexpected tasks	8	12	26/08/2018 14:01	RTS
	typical process	4	4	09/09/2018 14:55	RTS
	investment pitch	1	1	15/09/2018 10:50	RTS
	marketing talk	1	1	15/09/2018 10:47	RTS
	timeline	13	33	27/08/2018 12:21	RTS
	time pressure	1	1	16/09/2018 14:37	RTS
	cv	1	1	29/09/2018 14:48	RTS
	lunch	1	1	28/09/2018 10:11	RTS
	questions	4	6	28/09/2018 10:16	RTS
Stage 2 applicant activities		20	97	19/08/2018 15:13	RTS
	stand out	8	20	19/08/2018 13:14	RTS
	preparation	14	27	19/08/2018 13:17	RTS
	portfolio	2	3	22/09/2018 11:42	RTS
	research of company	15	22	19/08/2018 17:15	RTS
	timeline in final year	5	10	25/08/2018 11:59	RTS
	interview practice	7	9	19/08/2018 17:06	RTS
	practice tests	4	5	26/08/2018 17:18	RTS
	special technique	1	1	27/08/2018 09:07	RTS
	research on roles	1	1	27/08/2018 14:02	RTS

	cover letter	2	2	21/09/2018 09:13	RTS
Reasons for employer decision		23	145	20/08/2018 18:36	RTS
	what employers were looking for	22	80	19/08/2018 16:37	RTS
	communication skills	2	3	25/08/2018 11:05	RTS
	communication	1	2	19/08/2018 16:38	RTS
	analytical skills	1	1	25/08/2018 11:05	RTS
	creativity	1	1	25/08/2018 11:09	RTS
	time keeping	1	1	25/08/2018 11:09	RTS
	proactive	2	2	22/09/2018 14:23	RTS
	importance of experience	5	13	21/09/2018 10:29	RTS
	be employed	1	1	24/09/2018 09:52	RTS
	why got job	16	22	19/08/2018 13:34	RTS
	why missed out	17	34	19/08/2018 16:38	RTS
	confidence	2	3	19/08/2018 17:00	RTS
	what grads are looking for	1	1	16/09/2018 15:39	RTS
	willingness	5	7	21/09/2018 10:06	RTS
Job-hunting persona		13	32	19/08/2018 14:55	RTS
	recruiter	8	24	19/08/2018 12:47	RTS
	recruiter	4	9	24/09/2018 10:26	RTS
	standard job-hunting	3	4	19/08/2018 17:14	RTS
	head hunted	2	2	25/08/2018 17:52	RTS
	entrepenurial	1	1	09/09/2018 15:05	RTS
Rejected job		6	9	22/09/2018 10:54	RTS
Networking		22	127	22/09/2018 14:45	RTS
Business degree relevance		21	114	19/08/2018 12:46	RTS
Pinetree elements		21	99	27/08/2018 10:46	RTS
	internships	18	56	25/08/2018 10:54	RTS
	social enterprise	2	2	27/08/2018 14:09	RTS

	Internship	1	1	07/10/2018 09:54	RTS
	internships	8	15	15/09/2018 08:41	RTS
	internships	6	8	15/09/2018 09:00	RTS
	dissertation	10	13	27/08/2018 09:06	RTS
	employer engagement	3	5	27/08/2018 09:22	RTS
	entrepreneurship	2	3	27/08/2018 09:42	RTS
	presentations	3	5	02/09/2018 16:19	RTS
	team work study tasks	1	1	02/09/2018 16:19	RTS
	industry days	6	13	15/09/2018 09:00	RTS
	PCSA	1	1	22/09/2018 13:46	RTS
Emotions		23	343	19/08/2018 15:12	RTS
	feelings about process	23	140	19/08/2018 13:35	RTS
	fairness	5	10	19/08/2018 16:54	RTS
	time consuming	10	20	19/08/2018 17:17	RTS
	fitting in	15	32	19/08/2018 12:51	RTS
	humanising	16	47	19/08/2018 13:18	RTS
	number	2	2	15/09/2018 08:39	RTS
	lies	6	10	19/08/2018 13:53	RTS
	truth	1	2	26/08/2018 11:08	RTS
	being observed	6	9	25/08/2018 11:03	RTS
	feedback	17	32	19/08/2018 17:00	RTS
	criteria	2	2	26/08/2018 11:14	RTS
	rejection	10	20	25/08/2018 18:23	RTS
	expectations	1	1	25/08/2018 18:21	RTS
	resilience	3	5	26/08/2018 13:53	RTS
	grad choosing	13	25	26/08/2018 16:50	RTS
	fate	1	1	27/08/2018 09:27	RTS
	competitive job market shock	1	1	02/09/2018 16:21	RTS

	ethics	1	2	22/09/2018 10:20	RTS
	passion	2	2	28/09/2018 11:58	RTS
	success narrative	1	4	07/10/2018 10:21	RTS
	confidence	6	7	21/09/2018 09:22	RTS
	trauma	1	1	05/11/2018 08:21	RTS
	shy	2	3	23/12/2018 15:59	RTS
Signalling		20	122	19/08/2018 13:16	RTS
	values	1	2	26/08/2018 10:22	RTS
	screening	14	32	26/08/2018 10:19	RTS
	Bourdieu	1	6	02/09/2018 09:19	RTS
	Bourdieu	4	9	21/09/2018 10:44	RTS
	Doolittle	1	3	07/10/2018 10:12	RTS
	expectations of working environments	1	1	07/10/2018 11:24	RTS
	family	1	2	07/10/2018 10:44	RTS
	positional	1	1	27/08/2018 14:14	RTS
Useful quotes		23	406	25/11/2018 09:23	RTS
	quote	17	37	19/08/2018 14:07	RTS
	quoted conscious signalling	20	102	11/11/2018 17:57	RTS
	quoted digital signals	10	13	17/11/2018 17:29	RTS
	quoted intern other ex	7	28	11/11/2018 08:52	RTS
	quoted networking	18	85	18/11/2018 10:07	RTS
	quoted other ex	11	15	10/11/2018 11:44	RTS
	quoted presentations	5	9	10/11/2018 11:56	RTS
	quoted tests	1	1	11/11/2018 18:51	RTS
	quoted interviews	19	65	12/12/2018 02:15	RTS
	quoted humanising	18	50	17/12/2018 08:49	RTS

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Endnotes

ⁱ For example the way the typical process was described by the following: Pz.07##; Pz.05#; Pz.01#; Pz.21#; Pz.17#

ⁱⁱ See also Pz.14#9; Pz.18#9

ⁱⁱⁱ See Pz.15#12; Pz.17#11; Pz.07##15; Pz.04#9

^{iv} See the second example:

Pz.18#17 (Cz.56#) Yeah, it was definitely fun and different, which I liked compared to the other applications I've done

^v See further quotes on what employers were looking for in tests:

Pz.18#10 (Cz.20#) ... could you do the role, do you have the technical ability to do X, Y, Z. So, from these initial tests I think just that basic ability of can I do some basic judgements and numerical reasoning and just understanding my way of thinking, how I approach a certain situation.

Pz.08#11 One of them definitely just your ability to analyse data and... when you read the sort of stats just being able to relay them back and then the second one was... how do you react in certain situations.

Pz.03#6 it was one of those ones where you just have to get through as much as possible so they would just keep throwing it at you until the time is up, effectively. So it was an interesting one because they were testing your ability to obviously think on your feet quickly but at the same time it was trying to make sure that you weren't going through too quickly that you were compromising on quality so it's kind of getting that balance between quality and quantity...

Pz.03#10 thinking about how you think and how you spot patterns and make decisions, what you see in the exercises so particularly that one [shapes] because lots of people see different things and I don't know whether they probably have various different answers which they could be and it helps them to determine how you go through a thought process.

Though see Pz.21#17 (Cz.44#) for a more cynical view.

^{vi} See also Pz.15#13

^{vii} See further quotes on Participants' perplexity on what employers were looking for:

Pz.15#7 [on the shape and logic tests] Unless you learn those, you know, you can put what you think the answer is but you don't know for definite. When you do Maths, you- you know if that's the answer or- or not. And English, again, you can, if you're literate enough you know that that's the right answer. For the Logic one you couldn't be sure.

Pz.18#11 [on the online games] (Cz.56#) They were also kind of like puzzles, you know how quickly could you put the items in the box... Some of it was really quite random, what were they trying to get at. Some said 'how quickly can you analyse the picture or situation and then provide an answer' so some of it was more analytical and the speed with which you could observe and pick things up. One of them generally was how quickly you could press the button as such... so I don't quite know what that was trying to get at...

^{viii} See further examples of seeing the purpose of tests as a sift Pz.17#11 (Cz.19#); Pz.15#12; Pz.04#9

^{ix} See for example Pz.16# (Cz.61#); Pz.07## (Cz.60#); Pz.20# (Cz.06#); Pz.09# (Cz.07#); Pz.02# (Cz.62#); Pz.17# (Cz.12#)

^x Pz.01# Cz.49#

^{xi} Pz.20# (Cz.06#); Pz.17# (Cz.12#)

^{xii} Pz.21# (Cz.44#); Pz.09# (Cz.07#)

^{xiii} See for example Pz.07##7

^{xiv} Eg Pz.21# (Cz.44#)

^{xv} The maximum was three presentations for Pz.02# (Cz.62#)

^{xvi} See for example Pz.20#10 (Cz.21#); Pz.09#10 (Cz.07#)

^{xvii} See for example Pz.14# (Cz.11#); Pz.13# (Cz.31#)

^{xviii} See also Pz.19#7; Pz.09# (Cz.32#)11

^{xix} See further examples of enjoying presentations when they were pressurised:

Pz.17#14 (Cz.12#) so I was sweating and you know ripping through this and kind of made as much of an effort as I could and then he said, okay we'll do the same again, I'll show you a pamphlet of Cz.12# and the services that we offer and I want you to pretend I'm a client and you try to bid it. So did that, I had no idea...I personally thought I'd not done very well and then he said, you know, I really like the sort of way you came across, you were very sort of commercial focussed and confident with what you were saying. He said, not all of it was right but the purpose is how you sort of react to this sort of on the spot kind of here you go kind of thing.

Pz.18#12 (Cz.20#) Slightly stressful because I think what I find stressful about presenting is if you don't know what you're talking about, that's when... it's... noticeable... of course we all knew as a team what we wanted to discuss – we had planned it and prepared it, but...we don't work for Cz.20# and of course they knew that but still that thinking of should I have known more going into the interview or the presentation... but I just thought that this is maybe looking [more at] teamwork, how we communicate, how we do under pressure but also, you know, can we present, how do we present as well. So I was thinking, well that bit I can do, you know... but then again it's one of those weird things you get kind of a buzz afterwards of doing it, I think, because it's quite fast paced and you just do it and phew okay...

^{xx} See the following quotes on the purpose of presentations:

Pz.14#14 (Cz.11#) Competency, the ability to present and not be overwhelmed by that challenge, the fact that you were good at it because... you have to be able to present and I think they wanted to see that you could do that and... depending on what you've chosen to present about, they can tell quite a lot about you I think... it tells you a lot about the person just in terms of what they've picked and how they've also perceived that challenge so yeah I think it's kind of a mix of those things really.

Pz.11#11 (Cz.09#) I think they also want to see the kind of things that appealed to me like I think looking at their website they want to see character as well... why we like what we like and why it resonates to us as well.

Pz.20#10 (Cz.21#) They did ask questions on the presentation to sort of ... not to criticise necessarily but just to probe and see if I was able to defend what I'd written so sort of questions on my approaches and it didn't feel like they thought I was wrong, it just more felt like they wanted to know if I would stand my ground in what I'd said which I felt quite confident in but... I wouldn't be surprised if some people found that quite hard and quite intimidating because you don't always know the angle that they're coming at and whether they really do disagree with what you said or if they are just trying to see how well you can handle being questioned about something that you've done.

See also Pz.19#7.

^{xxi} See further descriptions of generic group exercises:

Pz.09#16 (Cz.32#) There was a group exercise in which...I don't know we played with like bean bags and things like that and we had to build a channel to one side of the room to the other and that sort of thing as a team.

Pz.13#14 (Cz.50#) so one of the tasks was you were stranded on an island and there's a list of ten items you have to decide which five you're going to keep and they were just looking at how we're discussing, who's taking the lead and all those little bits ... And then throughout the evening there were other different ones where five people that you would have to save in the world, having to justify your decision and then...so those were the first two tasks and at the end of it was more of a task where it was built about a role. So the role was in marketing and in groups, in different several groups, we had to justify...we had to come up with an idea of how we'd sell [a service] to others.

Pz.21#18 (Cz.44#) So the first task was like getting to know everyone so write something...write a secret about yourself on a post-it note, scrunch it up and throw it into the middle of the room.

RTS# [laughs]

Pz.21#... Go in, pick one up, if it's your own, throw it back in without being caught, but you pick one up and read it and you had to like guess or like go around the class...the room and talk to people, like is this...you go up to who you think it is and if it is you're talking about your life experience, things like that. That was a good kind of icebreaker, I guess.

^{xxii} See also this quote on the value of teamwork exercises:

Pz.19#7 (Cz.37#) it made sense because like she explained is sometimes you would have an idea that you think would work well, but another person in your team may not think so. So... it was not just a question of pitching your idea but also trying to, I think, find out whether you could actually collaborate with other people with differing ideas. Which was really great. And we presented so there was three of us in a group, and it was me and two other guys, and we did a short presentation, which was about ten minutes, and yeah so that went really well.

^{xxiii} See also Pz.07##7

^{xxiv} See Pz.02#12 and Pz.02#20 for more details

^{xxv} See Pz.19#7; Pz.07##4; add Pz.02#

^{xxvi} See for example Pz.01#7; Pz.02#7; Pz.05#7

^{xxvii} Some felt that it was not just the formal exercises but other elements that were also being assessed as shown in these examples:

Pz.01#32 at the end of the assessment they would challenge you to say what do you think could have gone better so they'd start asking you questions, so it wasn't...I feel it wasn't just a case of they were watching you in the assessment, it was then how would you reflect upon it. I suspect they were still marking at that point.

Pz.07##20 (Cz.17#) I remember they were like, 'do you want a drink' and everyone's like, 'shall we have a drink?'...and then we went to dinner with all of them and they kind of like split us up and put us on tables with all the employees. That was nice because it settled your nerves and you could talk to them about things before you've even been interviewed at all but I'm thinking, this is probably part of the interview, isn't it, how you actually get on with people. So I thought that was good because it kind of shows they're actually interested in you and it's not so set in stone. I'm really not a fan of interviews which are very black and white and they

write down your answers and judge you on that; they should judge you on how you are as a person.

See also Pz.07##14; Pz.02#12

^{xxviii} See for example Pz.07##5

^{xxix} Pz.08# Cz.04#

^{xxx} Pz.07##

^{xxxi} Pz.30#

^{xxxii} Pz.08# (Cz.04#)

^{xxxiii} Pz.07##; Pz.14#

^{xxxiv} See further examples of the lack of human interaction in asymmetric video exercises:

Pz.15#9 (Cz.55#) And then it went to the third round, which was the video interview...which was the most horrific experience of my entire life... I just found it difficult not talking to a person. I found it pressurising with the time. If you're in a normal interview you can take a moment, compose yourself, think about what you want to say, you can stop half way through, you can take a sip of water, you know.

Pz.01#33 (Cz.49#) I must admit, comparatively to a phone call... you feel quite fake. I mean everyone's got to be on their best behaviour in a telephone conversation but it's just that additional layer of...you know, you're watching your face move about, you want to look good but at the same time you just need to concentrate on what it is you're saying...you feel more like you're a Cz.06# presenter rather than somebody having a genuine conversation.

^{xxxv} See these quotes explaining what employers were looking for in asymmetric video exercises:

Pz.05#17 (Cz.30#), I think the video interview is quite a quick way of them seeing if you can think on your feet...that you come across well as well and I think a video interview just shows a bit more of your personality as well rather than a phone interview or an application or something.

Pz.01#34 (Cz.49#) and again maybe they're being, maybe it's purposely difficult, they're trying to get...maximise their chances of finding the best talent but it does, it felt a bit clunky, I think is the way to put it.

Pz.07##33 (Cz.17#) Ability to think on your feet. They're also seeing how you come across and whether you're giving answers that are actually relevant to what you're saying, whether you can take in information and give them something useful. I think it's quite easy to fool people in interviews, like they're probably forgotten what question they've asked you by the time you're answered it whereas in that it's very much like, this is the question, what answer have you given. Yeah, just how like personable you are.

See also Pz.15#14

^{xxxvi} Pz.07## (Cz.17#); Pz.29# (Cz.29#); Pz.25# (Masters at Cz.57#)

^{xxxvii} See Pz.02#4 (Cz.08#)

^{xxxviii} See further examples of role plays as described by Participants:

Pz.12#2 (Pinetree) then after that was the scenario kind of role play questions whereby because of part of my role I do have to do presentations and workshops to students and also very much manage the working relationship with teachers and our institution as well, as well as of course going to big Fairs and events and things like that so they wanted to give me some

example questions of the sorts of things a teacher would ask or a student would ask and see how I would respond to that... so, very much replicating what I do now.

Pz.22#3 (Cz.47#) so in front of three people, so the area manager, the centre manager and someone else who I can't remember at the moment, I had to teach them something, so I had to do like ten minutes where I would teach them a skill and I think they just wanted to see how I would come across and how I would relate to students so I taught them how to shuffle cards [laughs]. So I took a deck of cards and I just demonstrated how to shuffle cards and of course they loved that so I was you know... Yeah so I ended up teaching employability skills and customer service, it was really weird.

See also Pz.02#8 (Cz.08#) as an example of role-play and taking on board feedback midstream.

^{xxxix} See examples of why Participants were positive about role-plays even when rejected:

Pz.04#14 (Cz.10#) they were really trying to test like your ability to adapt and like take on information which I thought was actually they'd really well thought it out and yeah...now I see the back end of interviewing there is a lot of effort that went into that to get that really sorted and they knew exactly what they wanted.

Pz.19#6 (Cz.33#) [it] was pretty nerve wracking because that was my first experience of actually role-playing for a job interview, which I thought was pretty funny afterwards. But, it was also good in the sense that it was different from your usual, you know, job application/ interview process... you know when you send in your CV, yes you may or not receive a phone call or an email to say whether you've been shortlisted or not and then you go to your usual psychometric you know, test or assessment days etc, but this was very different- very, very different. And it was actually quite fun!

^{xl} See examples of companies looking for specific skills and experience using role-plays:

Pz.04#15 (Cz.10#) They hired someone with a little bit more customer service understanding or something, they were very clear on what they wanted... with that exercise testing your ability to adapt in a start-up. I think they probably wanted someone a bit more firmer and like confident ... because the person who'd had it had a couple more years' experience in customer service facing roles.

^{xli} See examples of Participants thinking one of the purposes of role-plays and analysis exercises was to see how candidates handled difficult situations:

Pz.19#8 (Cz.33#) I would actually say that it was quite daunting and challenging at the same time. But I suppose it's also the fact that they wanted to find out whether if you were put on the spot, how would you react to it? This is my take on it.

See further examples: Pz.02#8; Pz.09#7; Pz.07##10; Pz.17#7; Pz.20#10

^{xlii} See further examples of the informal internship approach to securing post-graduation work:

Pz.06#7 (Cz.45#) [the lecturer's] recruitment approach to universities... he kind of mentors students, he teaches lots of students, the good ones I think he openly says, you know if people want to come and do projects in my company then please do. Some people come forward, some of them he gives opportunities then do internships which effectively are very very long internships and then some of them after that then get offered a job, which is the best form of interview I think.

See another example with the same lecturer:

Pz.23#3 (Cz.45#) [the lecturer] actually, when he interviewed me for Big Pine, he said 'why do you want to come to Big Pine' and I gave a spiel about why I wanted to come to Big Pine and he joked and said, 'ah you should come and work in marketing for my company' and I took that and thought actually that would be really cool. He was joking but clearly I had done something... Well ... clearly he wasn't joking but clearly I'd done something which had impressed him somehow and I thought actually there might be a chance...

He goes on to describe how it evolved into a full time role after graduation:

Pz.23#7 (Cz.45#) just before first year ended for summer... [we] went for a walk, went for a coffee and he said 'do you want to come on board and do some projects over the summer', so do you want an internship essentially... so I started to do an internship, did an internship, did the whole summer, came back and [he] said, 'you've been really, really good, do you want to continue to do some projects'... so I just invoiced [him] on a monthly basis... and, yeah, over Christmas in my third year we sat down, I said 'it's been a really great two years or eighteen months, I'd really like to carry on' and [he] said, 'yeah absolutely, I'd like to go and do a consultation within the organisation to make sure everyone else is happy with it' and then a month later we had another meeting and he said 'yeah'.

^{xliii} See further examples of obtaining work through previous work experience:

Pz.12#3 (Pinetree) I'd been a student ambassador which is kind of quite a natural progression into the recruitment industry but then also, I had expressed an interest in coming to work at Pinetree as well already.

Pz.05#18 (Pinetree) I was actually in a role here before that so I was a student support associate, and that was, I think contracted for 12 months and I started working quite closely with the marketing team, organising events and things like that and the role became available so I had conversations with [them] and applied for that role through almost like a recommendation.

Pz.02#25 (Cz.34#) I sent my recommendation letter to him [from another Big Pine internship]...he took a look at it and said it's really good that you've made such an impact in your six weeks of being there. I have a role coming up at Cz.34# and wanted to know if you'd be interested in hearing more about it. [He had also done an internship with Cz.34#]

^{xliv} See also Pz.03#9

^{xliv} See other examples of job applications with employers with a pre-existing relationship:

Pz.12#4 (Pinetree) I quite enjoyed it to be quite honest, I think, through studying with Pinetree we did do a lot of presentations, we did do a lot of activities that did prepare us for that so we did get to go to a lot of companies, do presentations and pitches to various prospective maybe even employers in the future so it became more second nature so it wasn't daunting or scary.

See also Pz.15#8

^{xlvi} See Pz.12#; Pz.06#; Pz.23#

^{xlvi} See Pz.14#7

^{xlvi} See also Pz.06#8

^{xlvi} See also Pz.10#7

ⁱ See also further examples on why Participants who experienced an internship with the employer thought they got the job:

Pz.12#5 (Pinetree) *I think, perhaps a few different kind of maybe qualities, like kind of proactivity and dedication and showing a real strong interest but then I think ... my whole previous experience at Pinetree then wanting to work for the other side of it I think really did help because ... I do have to draw on my own experiences or talk about kind of the student experience [in my role]... so having that direct experience and obviously therefore complete knowledge of the... course set I think really, really helped me because I could understand from multiple perspectives what would then appeal to the student later on. So I think that certainly helped, but I think it was a combination of things really.*

Pz.06#4 (Cz.45#) *I think autonomy is probably one of the biggest ones, so that's his management style if you can call it that, and the company is run with this self-managing structure and decentralised so no-one is really told what to do and people are free to work on what they want so that is probably a must. I mean generally, I don't know if it's fair to say little guidance but there was little oversight in what I was doing... [and I] was left to be very independent right from the beginning really...*

Pz.23#4 (Cz.45#) *Oh I think because[he]I thought that I was...I tend to have quite a lot of energy in seminars and lectures anyway but I think I...I knew I wanted to work with him and I think [he] probably saw that.*

^{li} See Pz.17# (Cz.12#) for the largest number of interviews in a single application process.

^{lii} See for example Pz.07##20; Pz.21#11; Pz.02# (Cz.08#) and Pz.12# (Pinetree) (went for coffee as part of the final interview); Pz.09# (Cz.32#); Pz.13# (Cz.50#); Pz.21# (Cz.44#) all had lunch at assessment days.

^{liii} See also further descriptions of introductory interviews:

Pz.09#17 (Cz.07#) *so first round interview with someone from HR so typical stuff...[] That was kind of cultural fit type stuff, just sort of very very brief run through of the CV, what I was looking for in the next role.*

Pz.09#18 (Cz.32#) *I think it was cultural fit, that sort of thing. I think it was pretty brief, to be honest, really just sort of testing the basics of can you speak... []are you real basically and is this CV a phoney, sort of thing.*

Pz.21#19 (Cz.44#) *she asked me more about me as a person, what I like to do like outside of work, what I do with friends, and then work experience. Literally everything I had answered already in the application she wanted to hear it from my mouth basically because that's what most employers I've been to do that.*

Pz.09#19 (Cz.15#^{liii}) *so she set me up with a first stage telephone call with their HR, it was someone from HR, which was more of a cultural fit type interview so it was fairly general in terms of you know what's your background, what have you been doing, what you're kind of hoping to do next, why Cz.15#, that sort of thing.*

^{liv} Eg Pz.10# (Cz.20#); Pz.05# (Cz.30#).

^{lv} Others who mentioned using STAR: Pz.18#7 (Cz.20#); Pz.07##; Pz.02#; Pz.11#; Pz.16#

^{lvi} Eg see Pz.07##11

^{lvii} See also Pz.21#11 (Cz.18#) who made sure he dined with the CEO prior to starting an internship

^{lviii} See further examples: Pz.02#27; Pz.08#3 and Pz.08#7; Pz.19#2; Pz.04#7

^{lix} See other examples of quasi social events:

Pz.07##20; Pz.21#11; Pz.02# (Cz.08#) and Pz.12# (Pinetree) (went for coffee as part of the final interview); Pz.09# (Cz.32#); Pz.13# (Cz.50#); Pz.21# (Cz.44#) lunch at the assessment day

^{lx} Eg Pz.01#8 (Cz.20#); Pz.04# (Cz.54#)

^{lxi} Pz.17# (Cz.42#)

^{lxii} See examples of Participants being aware of the need to act in a certain way during teamwork:

Pz.07##34 (Cz.17#) it's not about the presentation in the end, it's more about how you actually get to that. I remember thinking, 'oh god, the point is I'll talk as much...I'll really encourage [others] to talk'... and it was in the feedback after, 'you're very inclusive, you're very good', so I was like 'oh okay, that's good'... you don't want to appear very overpowering so you need to include other people's ideas, it isn't just us. So I was, 'maybe you should speak up a bit' and I guess you kind of know there are people who are going to include other people and kind of get the point of this is a group exercise and not just you taking the reins.

For other examples see Pz.02#7; Pz.01#7; Pz.05#7

^{lxiii} See further quotes on dress:

Pz.10#11 I've always been taught that you should be the best dressed in the room, kind of thing, if you're going to do something do it properly or not at all and I knew I wanted this role, I knew I wanted to be here so impressions, first impressions count, five seconds and you know what a person is like.

Pz.14#15 I always wear a suit and a tie because it's easier and it's more comfortable. I feel more comfortable... I'd rather be overdressed than underdressed... again I think it's down to preparation, you just don't want to look underprepared, you want to look like you've made an effort and spent time thinking about it and how you're going to come across and... I feel like I'll perform better if I'm not worried about how they think I'm going to be perceived based on what I'm dressed in, so if I'm in a suit and tie they [will] perceive me one way and that makes me more relaxed, yeah...even if, I mean it literally happened in my first interview, at the end he said, oh I've never worn a tie in one day in my working life, and I was like okay, I won't wear a tie in my next interview... but I still for a first interview would just go in a suit and tie.

^{lxiv} Pz.08# also used formal dress to signal greater seniority as he felt he looked very young

^{lxv} See further examples on dressing to be relaxed:

Pz.02#26 I mean generally I don't wear a tie just to give off a more relaxed approach so, coming in, it makes the interview a bit less stringent.

Pz.18#13 I went smart casual so I wore a skirt, a black top, flat shoes and a sort of casual jacket but it could be borderline, it could be smarter or more casual... it was one of the smarter things I had with me at uni and I liked the skirt that I had so I thought...and I felt comfortable in it and it was something that wasn't new, so I thought don't wear something new because a) you might not necessarily feel comfortable in it or don't wear new shoes because they'll rub and then you'll be thinking about that rather than just focussing on what you need to remember for the interview and things like that. Maybe I did want a bit more of the feminine side and just be different from the guys that were going to be there, but not a huge amount of thought, just more of what's kind of smart but am I relaxed in and feel comfortable in.

^{lxvi} Sometimes companies actually told them what to wear eg Pz.11#(Cz.16#); Pz.13#

(Cz.31#)

^{lxvii} See further quotes re the importance of researching the employer:

Pz.20#14 (Cz.06#) They asked a question about what challenges I think they're facing at the moment... for those kind of questions I think they're trying to work out if you actually are interested in what you're applying for and if you've done your research around it rather than just sort of going for the job that you liked the look of, because it's those kind of questions where you actually do need to do a bit of digging and research beforehand to be able to answer it properly.

Pz.14#16 (Cz.46#) [they are looking for] someone who has really seriously thought about each step of the application form. If you've actually spent a significant chunk of your time focusing on it and dedicating time to it I think that shows that you really want it at that stage, whereas I think a lot of people just kind of do a load of grad scheme applications and kind of just splurge answers into each field and I feel like they would be able to tell the difference between someone who really wanted to apply for that grad scheme and someone who was really just doing the rounds and applying to lots because that shows that you really want to work at that company or in that role.

^{lxviii} See further examples on values:

Pz.16#6 So I would certainly look at core values, that's something that kind of has often come up doing interviews, how you fit into a company's core values, I think it's just something recruitment managers [like].

Pz.01#35 when you go in at that graduate level, your personal statement might be a bit longer because... you've not got that work profile history so you fill up that page instead... so that is when you start padding out, you know I hit the cultural values of the company in this way, even if you're doing it subtly...

See also Pz.19#2

^{lxix} See Pz.09#9

^{lxx} See further examples of Participants thinking of Pinetree as a USP:

Pz.01#36 again be different... it's not a guarantee being different is going to get you a job but my word it makes it so much easier to have something ready to say. 'Where did you study, University of Hertfordshire', 'Where did you go to university, well I didn't actually, I went to business school, oh' and it just instantly changes the tone of the conversation... even now I talk to people about that and they still go, oh wow that's different. So don't follow the way it always has to be, there's so many different ways...

Pz.17#9 my question to myself was, am I going to go to university to have a standard university experience... or you know the reason I wanted to go to London was to immerse myself in industry and it was the right call at the end of the day.

Pz.19#9 But I also learnt that and this is where I had a laugh with my close friends and I said do you know what, we're all like Tesco, because every little helps. So every little thing that you've done, whether it's throughout the studies whether it was through an industry day, you know, it all helps and contributes to what you want to do later on in life. And I suppose using examples like, 'I've been to this employer, I've done that before, I've worked with you know, big names... organising you know interview skills day, and I've done you know, workshops or I won an award at Blackberry'... And so it was those things, you know that differentiates you from everybody else because what you've got to remember... is this is not your bog standard

university. You're getting you know, industry days, you're getting different opportunities that probably millions of students out there don't get. And it's use it to your own advantage.

See also Pz.07##19

^{lxxi} See an example of internships or work experience as a signal:

Pz.14#17 Work experience is definitely key, I would say, that was kind of the one thing...that was like how did I stand out [from] the other candidates and that was kind of what they said it was, you know you had really good work experience... I had a part-time job throughout uni so I think that shows a bit of graft or potentially you could interpret it that way, and I was there for like five years so it kind of instils a bit of loyalty.

^{lxxii} This one deliberately ensured his presentations maximised personal engagement:

Pz.02#27 (Cz.62#) I've always been the person that will put minimal writing on the slides. I just use that as hints and tips on the slides for me, not really for the other person, so the other person would look at the slide, not see much, look at me and then be engaged in what I'm saying.

RTS# Whereas if you put lots of stuff up they'd be looking at the slide, yes that's clever.

Pz.02# Something I learned from here as well!

^{lxxiii} This applicant used his presentation to show his own personal values in order to stand out, rather than using his dissertation:

Pz.14#18 RTS# What made you decide to do a presentation on role models?

Pz.14# I don't know...looking back now, I just wanted to do something a bit different, I didn't really want to do it on like my dissertation... I just wanted to show my style in a subject I kind of had a lot of interest in... I basically tied the role models to criteria that I deem really important in success, I think that was curiosity and integrity and so I made like a theme around that and I just thought it was a nice way of sort of conveying that message and that idea...

RTS# So you said you deliberately didn't want to talk about your dissertation.

Pz.14# Yeah... I thought they wouldn't remember, I thought I wouldn't stand out... because I feel like I thought that a few people would have done that and having talked to people afterwards quite a few people do do that as their presentation and I just wanted to do something different and kind of catch their eye a little bit more by doing something kind of a bit out there, not really that out there, but a bit different to usual.

^{lxxiv} See examples of Participants approaching employers for opportunities:

Pz.15#(Cz.43#); Pz.06#(Cz.45#); Pz.23#(Cz.45#); Pz.03# (Cz.24#); Pz.21#(Cz.18#); Pz.38 (Newscape)

^{lxxv} See for example Pz.07##17 and the idea that any "pizazz" would be weeded out

^{lxxvi} This can also be seen in the "sameness" of successful applicants described in some quotes: *Pz.07##18 (Cz.43#); Pz.10#9 (Cz.20#)*

^{lxxvii} See Pz.02#30.

^{lxxviii} See for example Pz.09#4, Pz.01#24, Pz.09#5

^{lxxix} See Pz.13#7; Pz.08#8

^{lxxx} See other examples of "key word bingo":

Pz.15#12 the key thing in LinkedIn it does searches by key word for recruiters and things like that so I'm trying to make sure that those are in there. [for example] campaigns, content creation, things like that.

RTS# So to some extent the purpose of this is to come up on recruitment searches?

Pz.15# Yeah because otherwise they won't [find you]- you know, that's what they're looking for those key words again that's how they're gonna filter.

Pz.17#15 I probably wouldn't have got approached if I hadn't had experience prior so that...

RTS# So that was through was Cz.14#?

Pz.17# It was Cz.14# and I just wrote obviously a small little caption on what they do... 'executive search' and based on that I came up in search preferences...

RTS# Oh is this through LinkedIn?

Pz.17# Yeah so they run a search and then set up the emails that way.

See also Pz.22#7

^{lxxx} See also Pz.10#8 who felt that a face to face interview may have got him a role

^{lxxxii} See also Pz.20#9 and for an unsuccessful example Pz.01#8 (Cz.20#)

^{lxxxiii} See also Pz.07##15

^{lxxxiv} See quotes on understanding the need for sifting:

Pz.17#11 (Cz.19#) so after you apply they ... send you off the aptitude test - obviously this is just a screening method to sort of shorten the target pool.

See other examples: Pz.15#12; Pz.04#9; Pz.07##1

^{lxxxv} See a sample quote on the time consuming nature of job applications:

Pz.14#9 you understand why they do it because you know they get so many more applications and they have so many less places but yeah it's just a lot longer and it almost turns you off straight away because you know it's a barrier straight away to have to fill in all the information a second time round and if you do a few grad schemes it's the same and you can use the same information across all of them but you kind of want to tailor each application and there's just not enough time to do that for all of them.

Many more examples Pz.21#12; Pz.18#9

^{lxxxvi} See Pz.01#9 and Pz.04#9

^{lxxxvii} See more examples of advice to students re digital signalling:

Pz.19#10 I would say, you know the research, tailoring your cover letter but also making sure that those key words that they are looking for appear in your statement or in your CV so then you get, you know, filtered through to the next round.

Pz.16#7 One thing we didn't cover ...[is] when you're doing an internet kind of application so more support on those, some example ones and working through it, picking out best answer and stuff like that... putting it actually down into words is something that I certainly never did at uni but I think more people should. I just think it's the nature of the beast and more people

are applying for jobs, certainly through online software tools, that's what people are using now.

lxxxviii See also Pz.06#8 which sees it as a combination of both merit and luck;

lxxxix See also further examples of people finding out about roles through their network:

Pz.20#15 (Cz.21#) I think initially I knew I wanted to work for an agency as I was thinking about who we have on our roster at the Cz.06# who would be...[unclear] to work for, Cz.21# came up and actually the first sort of touch into that was my...the head of my team at the Cz.06# that happened to know someone that is quite senior at Cz.21# which is quite common... in the research world people will go from agency to client and just know each other and she told me that there were...I didn't necessarily get an interview through her but it was definitely sort of like a first touch with the company.

Pz.08# described how all his roles within Big Pine had been via his network:

Pz.08#12 (Big Pine) In terms of knowing people, at Big Pine that was always [unclear] I had about four or five different jobs there and then every job was always...because I know this person and I've helped them out on some project, they've remembered me and then after about a year they'll call and say, oh we've got a job here and I think you should apply for it and obviously [you get it?] and then at Big Pine every one of my jobs I did that but [unclear]

Pz.12# was contacted by Pinetree to apply for a role after being a student ambassador and having indicated interest to staff:

Pz.12#6 (Pinetree) So the process I went for that, so that was a recommended role, um, by James Thomas. So, he, we had regular meetings before that talking about, as he does with all the students, speak to them, talk about kind of their career ambitions, what it is that they want to get into, um, where do you see yourself kind of in your first role type thing, and I did say that I that kind of option A would really be Pinetree, 'cause through all my research, all the companies that I'd been to on industry days, it was Pinetree and of course wider Big Pine that, the culture, the values, all of that sort of thing, really appealed to me. And I didn't see another institution that I preferred I really wanted to continue that whole university journey.

See further examples: Pz.05# worked on a short contract and then was recommended for role at Pinetree; Pz.10# was approached by Pinetree after an internship; Pz.17#10 head hunted another Pinetree graduate; Most of Pz.22#7's jobs were as a result of an approach from her network; Pz.04#7 was introduced via her network to the job opportunity at Cz.54#; Pz.05# was sent opportunities by TD at Pinetree; Pz.13# sent TAP opportunity by TD at Pinetree (unsuccessful) and he has also been sent other jobs by TD at Pinetree.

^{xc} See examples of students getting internships through their network which then turned into permanent roles after graduation:

Pz.06#5 (Cz.45#) So first year I kind of started working with Sam Appleby on some societies and PCSA and...what was the other one...Selected Perspectives which was the talk series so I kind of got close to Sam and was working with him and Sam was working at Cz.45# so then...and Daniel was obviously my lecturer, he was the CEO of Cz.45#. Got on well with Daniel and found his August lectures very engaging and interesting and then I think I just sent

him my CV and said, you know I really like what your company's doing, I find it all very interesting and would love to be able to contribute in some way if possible.

See also Pz.37; Pz.38; Pz.05#; Pz.10#; Pz.15#; Pz.03#; Pz.23#7 (Cz.45#); Pz.03#8; Pz.06#7

^{xc}i See also Pz.15#15 (Cz.43#) for a different tactic where she created an opportunity within her employer while at Cz.43# by requesting one week's work experience with another department. This led to a job role in the new department.

^{xc}ii Eg of recruiters contacting Participant Pz.09# (Cz.15#); Pz.14# (Marketing Co)

^{xc}iii Eg Pz.17# (Cz.12#) contacted directly by the employer from his LinkedIn profile

^{xc}iv Eg Pz.11# (Cz.16# 1)

^{xc}v See further quotes on recruiters:

Pz.11#12 (Cz.16# and others) So I signed up to a recruitment agency who specialise in marketing and digital jobs in the south-west, they were called Cz.02# and when they tell you about jobs they don't tell you the company until you kind of go into more deeper conversations so I didn't even know Cz.16# existed so they kind of rang me up and said, you're going to be near Bristol aren't you so here's the role. It was a content exec role so they sent me over the job description and it just had roles and responsibilities, accountabilities...it definitely seemed like a step up from my role at Pinetree so I think from there they put my name forward and put my CV forward - so they had that all on record - to Cz.16#.

Pz.02#28 (Cz.08# and others) I mean I went through a recruiter so I didn't really apply, they just set up interviews for me.

Pz.09#20 (Cz.15# and others) So I was contacted by a recruiter, actually back in December – I didn't respond until April and that was just about sort of general, are you interested in looking. I didn't respond until April because that was when I started looking slightly more seriously. Anyway I got back in touch with her, she put me...she walked me through a number of different roles she had at the time, of which Cz.15# was one, so she set me up with a first stage telephone call with their HR.

See other examples: Pz.14# (Marketing Co); Pz.08# (Cz.39#).

^{xc}vi Eg Pz.13# (Cz.31#) Pinetree TD helped him practice his presentation and others went to family members for advice or practice Pz.05# (Father) Pz.18# (Grandfather) Pz.15# (Father) though none of these ended in a job offers.

^{xc}vii See also further examples of industry network contacts assisting with the job-hunting process:

Pz.20#16 (Cz.01#) actually my friend who I mentioned before who had worked at that school, she put me in contact with one of the teachers who said he was willing to have a chat with me after I'd done some preparation for the session and I could ask him questions so that was massively, massively helpful because I was a bit confused initially.

This one had a gap year at Cz.20# before studying at Pinetree and immediately reached out to that network to help with her graduate scheme application:

Pz.18#8 (Cz.20#) Then what I did, as soon as I submitted, I'd applied through the website and done all the things officially online, I then got back in touch with the people I'd worked with in my gap year and said, look I've reapplied, kind of a) just to let them know but then b) if there are any helpful conversations I could have as a result.

See also Pz.02# (Cz.62#) whose father worked at the company; Pz.17# who headhunted another Pinetree graduate.

^{xcviii} See further examples on the recruiters acting as advisers:

Pz.11#13 (Cz.16# 1) So I went for me first interview but before that Cz.02# were quite good in that they kind of told me who the company were, what...things from dress code to interview tips – yeah ‘cause Cz.16#’s not very suited and booted, quite chilled and relaxed attire – so things that would kind of help me get through the door and guided me about...kind of went through the job description and maybe highlighted things that I could talk about with my CV, which was really helpful.

Pz.14#19 (Marketing co) I mean I liked especially having a recruiter like really not hold your hand but give you support and feedback and just kind of a bit more human interaction before you actually go in was really useful for me. Instead of kind of...otherwise you kind of feel you’re going in blind a little bit.

^{xcix} For other examples of tactical approaches see Pz.18#8 (Cz.20#); Pz.01#8 (Cz.20#)

^c See Pz.04#9

^{ci} In several other examples Participants tried to use their network to source job opportunities but their efforts did not lead to work, sometimes even when they had had internships with relatives (eg Pz.21#). Pz.18# (Church) applied for a role suggested by her father and proactively arranged a call but did not get any further; Pz.18#9 (Cz.56#); Pz.18# (Cz.63#), applied because friends did but did not get through the initial tests; Pz.05# reached out to her father’s network for opportunities and had some conversations but no job applications arose from this; Pz.05# was told about job opportunities by Pinetree and used LinkedIn to check for what her peers were doing, but no job offers resulted; Pz.02# (Cz.62#) was offered a graduate scheme job in the company where his father worked, but turned it down.

^{cii} Examples of Participants seeing networking as potentially unfair in some circumstances:

Pz.17#16 Why is someone that might have done fantastically academically in top tier and has all these relevant internships is getting [rejected] because they don’t know someone internally and I think that’s just lacklustre of them and you know I don’t think that’s right because not everyone’s got the same background.^{cii} (He is referring to examples of networking he saw as nepotism he had heard about from non-Pinetree friends)

Pz.09#21 (Cz.07#) I spoke to the careers consultant at Cz.57#^{cii} and you know he was like prepare prepare prepare, his entire job was preparing people for the McKinsey, Cz.07#, Bain... you know those interview processes right down to the tie that you wear which for me feels a bit extreme, a bit too much. (He was studying for a Masters at Cz.57# at the time)

Pz.07##35 (Cz.60#) I think it’s probably as fair as they could make it. I think you had an advantage if you worked at Cz.60# and you definitely did because some of the people who worked at Cz.60# who were ‘oh, I’m a manager, got through [to] the graduate scheme, they helped me prepare for this’; and they can name drop quite a bit so, yeah, I think that was the only advantage^{cii}. (This graduate scheme was open to recent graduates and existing employees. So Pz.07## was competing with existing managers who therefore had a networking advantage under our definition of networking).

And this one seemed angry at his discovery of the importance of networking, indicating he sees it as unfair. Though he still decided to use it:

Pz.21#20 it's like it's not what you know it's who you know, right what you know means one per cent, right, I could have done a [completely different] degree here and got the job that I'm doing now, right, because it's who you know.

^{ciii} See also Pz.06#8 (Cz.45#)

^{civ} See further examples on the need to prove yourself, even if networking is used: This Participant pointed out how non-merit based networking ultimately backfires to companies:

Pz.17#17 (speaking about Cz.25# from a friend) just going on Cz.25# and [another students'] experience, obviously it's a very male dominated industry, the whole... He finds that there's a lot of lower – well I say lower tier if they work for us, people coming in, you know for meetings and stuff like that, they're only there because of X Y and Z and they've bypassed a whole process and so you know, you go okay, you know, someone can vie for you but from a talent perspective for your company as a whole, is it really smart for you to bypass someone before that when really you've got people that are maybe like more proactive and you know don't have it as easy so they're willing to fight for a bit more...you know I'd rather personally take that person over so and so's son or daughter would be keen come and work...

This Participant head-hunted another Pinetree graduate, and was careful to explain that the headhuntee got it entirely on his own merit and did the full process:

Pz.17#10 ...with James it was I didn't get him the job, I facilitated that first call...incentivised by you know a referral scheme internally and he had to do the rest ...James didn't have to bypass anything and that was fair, you know,[that I] facilitated that, I was asked my thoughts and relationship with him, just saying student peers but obviously we're not...

RTS# You're not making the decision and you're not pressuring other people to make a decision.

Pz.17# No I'm not and it's always nice to hear that he's doing well and stuff like that but I wasn't spending my day you know giving him tips and stuff like that. We spoke a couple of times and I said this is what executive search is but I wasn't say, you know, you need to do this ...

^{cv} See for example EU7# (Cz.54#); Pz.21#7 (Cz.18#); Pz.02# (Cz.62#); Pz.09#8 (Cz.15#); also Pz.14#7 with the story of the CEO's niece; and the references to working with recruiters

^{cvi} See for example Pz.01#8 (Cz.20#); Pz.21#7 (Cz.18#)

^{cvi} See another example of a Participant deliberately not wanting to use his network, though he explained this was a question of independence rather than ethics:

Pz.14#20 It's quite embarrassing but I feel like I have a sense of pride in that I just applied for a job on Guardian jobs and like I didn't go through my network which is silly but like I just kind of...I don't know, I wanted to just do it myself the first time just to kind of prove to myself that I could which is, I don't know, weird but...

RTS# No it's interesting. Explain that a bit more.

Pz.14# I don't know, I just didn't want to like have a family friend say, well I have this opening if you want it and just...basically I think I just wanted to wait for the right job, not that I was picky but I didn't want to just start work just for the sake of it because I could get a job here

because someone I knew could get me [one]... I wouldn't do that now, now I would definitely be like, does anyone know of anything, like you give me some pointers?

^{cviii} See further examples of conflicted views:

This one draws a confused distinction between networking to get your first role (not OK) and networking once you are in work (OK):

Pz.20#17 had I got onto the apprenticeship scheme itself through someone that I knew that wouldn't have been fair. That's not to say I wouldn't have done, not because it's not fair but I think that because I took the opportunities while I was there that's how it sort of worked out.

This one is unsure of how he would have acted had he understood the power of networking at the start:

Pz.17#18 it's like you know if I'd known that two, three or four years ago, I started, would I be in a different position? But then would I be happy that I'd got that myself and so loads of questions to play.

^{cix} Pz.18# (Church) (father) unsuccessful; Pz.21# (sisters) short internships only; Pz.02# (father) job offer but turned down

^{cx} Pz.05# (Father); Pz.18#9 (Grandfather); Pz.15# (Father) though none of these ended in a job offers

^{cx}ⁱ See also Pz.04#8; Pz.17#13; Pz.14#20

^{cxii} Pz.14#7; Pz.06# (Cz.45#); Pz.18#

^{cxiii} Pz.02# explains he still did a lot of work for the application even though he skipped the initial applications stages:

Pz.02#29 That was one that I did a lot of prep for beforehand to know exactly what they do.

RTS# So even though your dad works there you still did a lot of prep?

Pz.02# Yeah, my dad works on the engineering side and if I was going to legal then I would go into all areas of the business so I would be working with I guess engineering, with the naval unit, with whoever else depending on the bids and projects that they have.

^{cxiv} Quote continues:

Pz.02# You get a few people that will be 'isn't that cheating?' but of course it's not.

RTS# What do you see it as?

Pz.02# Just being smart, I guess. Why wouldn't I want go in there with as much information as I had?

RTS# So you see it as prep?

Pz.02# Yeah, essentially if I knew what they were looking for, that's why recruiters are there in the first place.

^{cxv} See further examples of using networking being easier for employers:

Pz.14#21 it has happened in my company, someone senior comes over and says, oh we need to fill this role I know someone perfect for it, there's nothing wrong with that in my eyes, it's kind of part of it, it just...it works, but that isn't to say you might find a better candidate out there, it's easier in a way.

RTS# Do you think it's easier to go with someone that you know?

Pz.14# *It's easier for the company to do that than say you know have to interview loads of people and if they know that there's someone here that will do the job well and they can work with then why wouldn't you go that route, I mean it's how people set up businesses together.*

^{cxvi} The quote continues as he goes on to also compare it with people preparing for degree apprenticeship applications:

Pz.02#30 *you get people that haven't done any prep at all and they would come through and they would talk and they would be like 'why do you want to do L'Oreal'? And they would be like 'I really want to do cosmetics' but that's not really what I want to be hearing because that's not what your role would be. You're not going to be selling cosmetics. And then you get others that would come in and they just know what the degree and the job description is inside out and they will tell you 'I want to do it because I like marketing', and 'I like marketing' and the fact that they have an interest in the cosmetics industry just acts as a massive plus and like, well that's the answer I want to hear and now you've made me think that you'd be quite good for this role and if they have good marks in the group exercise that we do then by means just show that they are quite clued-up and whether the other person that came in first said 'but I didn't want to do any research because I wanted to make it fair for everyone else there', I don't care because I want the best person for it. If you go to L'Oreal you're going to be representing Pinetree just like if I put someone into a process with GSK they will be representing me and they'll be representing Cz.08# so I'm not going to put anyone who hasn't prepared enough.*

^{cxvii} See also Pz.21#7; Pz.21#8; Pz.21#9 on using networking to compensate for his (he felt undeserved) 2:2

^{cxviii} See further examples of the importance of networking once in the workplace:

Pz.17#19 *The top people especially when I'm you know fortunate enough to speak to these executives across the board and it's really interesting but they are all the same calibre in the sense of you know they've done it for the most part themselves to get where they are, it's not you know tapping someone up. But then I've also noticed how as soon as you step into work, especially in the city... it's very like, 'ah come for a drink' or 'come for this thing and you meet someone there' and then they talk and so and so. Going on a finance thing via a connection, someone at an asset management firm has said if I'd be interested in jobs and they'd love me to go and speak to them... it's funny that as soon as you step into work you see how, for the most part anyway, how things really translate via communication peer to peer and network.*

Pz.20#18 *Once you are in, which I got through getting onto the apprenticeship scheme, that's when you build your networks, that's me speaking to my colleagues and expressing the kind of interests in the jobs I wanted later and using them rather than just coasting ... I was expressing my interest from the very beginning about the kind of things I was interested in, so later when I went back to them, they knew I was already interested.*

See further examples: Pz.23# (Cz.45#) who uses networking to build the business; those now working as recruiters who need to build networks to find candidates (Pz.02#; Pz.17#); Pz.04# and the importance of networking in the London tech start-up scene; and Pz.18# and the importance of networking for a global company employer.

^{cxix} See further quotes on advising students to build networks while studying:

Pz.20#19 *I think whilst you're studying it's to start getting and building your network and having sort of your...because I got those from being within my job and speaking to my*

colleagues but if you've got, you know, lecturers or other people who can help you in sort of building those networks around where you could get some experience even if it is things like a placement week in your reading week for example, things like that, anything like that is really helpful because as soon as someone knows your name then they might be able to push you through an application, the application process a bit faster or help you maybe get past certain things.

Pz.08#13 And the other thing I would suggest to them is to sort of [unclear] and start making connections on LinkedIn...when they're doing internships...sort of big corporations. I'd always encourage bigger corporations rather than going for smaller businesses for internships...personal preference, you can make a lot more connections, you can meet people, you can talk to them and say, I want to do this when I finish university and it's a...you have a lot more opportunity for people to turn around and say, okay we're going to be looking for a junior in a year's time or in six months' time, just give me a call when [unclear]. I think that happens a lot more with big corporations than smaller businesses

Pz.15#13 Yeah a million per cent like you need to— you need to like talk to people and you need to find out what the different roles are and you need to make relationships with people so that you can pull on those relation- like, for me to get that uh, week's work experience, essentially I had to have two of those relationships in line before it even got to someone who could offer me a week, so I suppose, yeah definitely having those, it does make a big difference. Very important. And even just knowing how to- learning how to talk to people, you know and summing yourself up in a little sentence, and being able to have those first introductions...

^{CXX} See another example on networks helping students:

Pz.12#8 I think networking is really important, making sure that there's people out there who are looking out for you and you can maybe turn on them later on and find a job with them so I think, yeah.

See also Pz.02#22.

^{CXXI} See further quotes on using networks to get different perspectives:

Pz.18#14 I think what I found useful was being pointed in directions I hadn't thought of, so particular areas that I hadn't realised were options or companies I hadn't heard of, so what I would love to be able to... provide for [students] are options that they hadn't necessarily thought of... trying to yeah just show them what else is out there.

Pz.03#11 and other companies it was word of mouth and talking to friends who were either applying or were currently working there or had worked for those companies. That was not just my peer group but also wider than that so family friends, my parents, some of their friends...I wouldn't say it was off and going out there and I wasn't always going out there and asking these questions but obviously throughout the last two or three years I picked up a quite few things from speaking to people and identified a few companies which I thought, actually that sounds like a company that I could be interested in. I also went to a few graduate fairs... that was very interesting talking to them and hearing their experiences and what they did on a day to day basis. I think the hardest thing I've certainly found, and I know a lot of my friends did, was actually really understanding what the role would really entail on a day to day basis especially when you're applied for quite broad roles or rotational roles and if you weren't a hundred per cent sure as to what you wanted to do as well it was kind of the unknown because I had...unlike some people I had maybe more internship experience but it was very

different to the sort of role I was probably going to be applying for so that was one of the hardest things and that helped quite a lot.

Pz.18#15 (on Cz.20#) a lot of the business people I've met, everyone's very similar in one sense: the go-getting, you take the initiative, you know, a lot of the time people have gone out their way to help me in certain areas so being willing to help others, to you know, thinking out side of the box is kind of a cliché term but building your network, having the ability to build your network and get involved in things so that you can then draw in experience and expertise from other areas and in that was it opens up opportunities for you but also can open up opportunities for others.

^{cxix} See further examples of meeting different people through networking:

Pz.04#13 I think people that, like-minded people that go to these events and do extra stuff and I think quite a few with an interest in like diversity inclusion, they were always good ones because... like okay I want to go and learn about this but there'll be interesting people here.

Pz.22#4 there's the connections you make I think when you do a business degree. I mean I've seen it with the younger ones, how they all kind of you know connect with each other and fire off ideas and so many of them have gone on to start businesses together or get involved in businesses together... it's sort of to feel at ease within that world and to feel that it's accessible to you.

^{cxviii} Examples of positive experiences even though they were rejected: Pz.05#15 (Cz.53#); Pz.19# (Cz.37#); Pz.11# (Cz.09#).

Described as a fair process even though rejected: Pz.05# (Cz.30#); Pz.07## (Cz.60#); Pz.11# (Cz.09#).

Examples of quotes that show an understanding of the need to sift large numbers of applicants: Pz.15#12; Pz.04#9; Pz.07##1; Pz.17#11

^{cxvii} See for example Pz.10#7

^{cxvi} See for example Pz.17#14 cf Pz.01#2

^{cxv} See for example Pz.11#6

^{cxiv} See for example Pz.21#10; Pz.01#18; Pz.05#10

^{cxiii} See for example Pz.10#6

^{cxii} See for example Pz.01#29

^{cxix} See for example Pz.18#9; Pz.14#9; Pz.21#12

^{cxviii} See for example Pz.18#9 (Cz.56#); Pz.11#7 (Cz.09#).

^{cxvii} Several others also spoke of the difficulty of coping with long and uncertain timelines, with the longest being kept on hold for a year before finally being rejected, Pz.15# (Cz.55#).

^{cxvi} See his quote on how his success rate "beat the odds":

Pz.01#37 At the time I felt quite happy because...well not happy but I thought I'm beating the odds because I remember individuals at university saying to me, oh you'll take thirty or forty applications so when I did it in ten I thought, right well I'm ahead of the trend so not too bad. Yeah it's pretty rough when they don't even acknowledge your existence but then you still get emails later on because you're on some subscription list thing, oh would you like to apply for this and you just think, pah please, they're not even looking, they're really not even looking.

^{cxv} See further quotes on rejection becoming a learning experience:

Pz.18#16 (Cz.56#) I think also just because it was one of the first ones I applied for and I spent quite a bit of time on the CV, trying to tailor it to exactly what I think they're looking for and

making it relevant to them and why I want to work for [them] and the fact that they wouldn't even look at that, but that's the whole job-hunting process and you'll have rejection after rejection and you'll spend time on various applications so that was part of the learning curve of, okay this is going to be part of it, so that was just a learning curve for me.

Pz.10#12 (Cz.20#) I was upset: it's not the greatest feeling being knocked back or not being able to take a job because of a particular requirement [travel] but it didn't stop me. I was still as determined, if not more determined to gain a job.

^{xxxv} Eg Pz.05#; Pz.15#; Pz.12#; Pz.03#; Pz.18#; Pz.22#; Pz.06#; Pz.23#; Pz.37

^{xxxvi} See also Pz.06#; Pz.37; Pz.23#, though Pz.38 used this technique to secure a job but still applied for 30 jobs

^{xxxvii} Eg Pz.11#8 (Cz.16# 1); Pz.14#8 (Marketing Co); Pz.09#8 (Cz.15#); Pz.02# (Cz.08#)

^{xxxviii} Pz.15# (Cz.55#)

^{xxxix} See Pz.15#8 on relationship building

^{cxl} Pz.15# for both Pinetree and Cz.43#

^{cxli} See these summaries of two further examples that also retreated from the fight: Pz.12# decided to avoid the fray altogether, never applying for graduate schemes or any other job at all, but instead focused on securing work at Pinetree which she said she loved as an organisation. Her first choice was simply not to leave her university environment and she continue to work at Pinetree (see Pz.12#7).

Pz.10# thrived once given the opportunity for a personal, informal face-to-face interview that took account of his disabilities and gave him the chance to show his value. He even said that he would never apply for another job while he had this one, as it would be disloyal, rejecting the fray of the future (see Pz.10#7).

^{cxlii} See his quotes re risk of showing your true self; Pz.01#12; Pz.01#13; and also Chapter 10 on indirect signalling.

^{cxliii} See also Pz.15#10

^{cxliv} Quote continues:

Pz.07##36 RTS# So if you were running this what would you want to do differently?

Pz.07##(Cz.43#) I think about bit more like life experience, what have you actually done that makes you different rather than how do you sound when you answer interview questions because everyone can prep for that. I think more like the actual doing is important.

^{cxlv} See Pz.09#9

^{cxlvi} Quote continues:

Pz.12#9 almost became more like a bit of a almost not a box ticking exercise but almost that kind of determination and getting to that next step but then, if you don't get it, it's that, again, the rejection but then also it might not have been the right pathway and I think, it's also, it seemed like a lot to have a decision made when you're still very much in the midst of kind of the peak exam period or the peak assessment period to kind of be like, ok, I'm ready to now apply for a job that could then shape the rest of my life, even though you know not necessarily jobs for life, but, it seemed, yeah it just didn't seem like the right step for me. I wanted something that was more of um, kind of, well not necessarily a permanent role, but then something where I felt like I could make a genuine contribution to that company. I wasn't there and seen as someone that would be here and disappear in a few months. I think that's what it was it was more, I wanted to feel valued wherever I went, and that I genuinely could

make an impact, so I'm not saying that graduate schemes aren't good I'm sure they're incredible.

^{cxlvii} See another example of why this Participant prefers face to face interaction:

Pz.10#10 (Cz.20#) For me, in my opinion, I like face to face. I find it very hard to type something...not very hard but I prefer speaking to someone because you can see their emotions, you can see their facial actions and I wish that was more involved in the stage...

See also Pz.10#8 (Cz.20#).

^{cxlviii} See also Pz.08#7 Cz.39#

^{cxlix} For longer quote see Pz.01#14-16. See also Pz.08#7; Pz.07##18; Pz.10#8

^{cl} See another example of the view of a graduate scheme process not revealing the true value of a candidate:

Pz.15#14 (Cz.55#) if you look at that I'd done a week's work experience with Cz.43# and then off the back of that, you know, been offered a job. And a lot of my working life it's kind of gone that way, through merit, through actually working and making those relationships. And I don't think perhaps the interview process [and tests] suits me because I can't – I can't come across in that way. They don't know that about me.

In her view, the method she used to gain a week's work experience through her work network was more meritocratic than semi-automated methods.

See also Pz.10# and Pz.13#.

^{cli} Quote continues:

Pz.02#31 I'm not going to push someone into a job because it's worked for me and it goes on the basis on my personal training as well, everyone's body is different. If I kept giving everyone the same programme eventually it's not going to work for someone and they're going to pick up on it so I would sit down with them like this, we need to figure out what they want, what they are interested in, and at least give them the choice to do one or two. So for me I was interested in marketing and accounting – I did both of them – I figured out I liked marketing more and stuck with it. So if someone has an interest in law and someone has an interest in something else then I would recommend that they try it at least once, at least through an internship.

^{clii} Quote continues:

Pz.12#10 No matter whether it's related to employment whether it's related to volunteering, whether it's related to something kind of, something else. And I think I would help them link a job role to that purpose. Advise that there are lots of options out there and whether it be a big company, small company, think about corporate culture, think about the pay, the the responsibility level, the industry. I don't think it's quite as simple as find a job and apply, it's figuring out in themselves what's best for them.

^{cliii} See also Pz.23#1 on the future of recruitment being internships

^{cliv} Eg Pz.15# (Cz.43#) and Pz.06# (Cz.45#), both of whom were working for the company prior to getting a permanent job offer and both of whom said the degree itself was probably not necessary for that particular job offer. It is interesting to think about what this means for the working student studying for a degree.

^{clv} This participant recognised the need for a competitive advantage in any careers assistance provided by Pinetree;

RTS#Pz.15#16 So do you reckon like all business schools in London, for example, should do more to help people or do you think would it feel any better if only we did it? (Laughs)

Pz.15# Well yeah it would have to only be us because then again you've got the same problem because if everyone did it it's not going to have the filter. So it only works if a small amount add on to get through this kind of. And then if other people clock onto what's happening, you're already one step ahead, what's the new thing that the recruiters are doing?... So as long as you're one step ahead you'll always be above everyone else.